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Week 51: Fall Mission Feeding

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Stacy Henagan

Sheila: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. Here with my co-host, Randy Robison. I'm really excited about this show, Randy because I think, there is probably a lot of you out of there at the moment and you're going through some really difficult stuff. Maybe you even question God, where are you in all of this? Who are you in all of this?

Well, our guest today, Stacy Henagan is going to talk to us about that journey in a book called *Breathe Again*. Welcome! It's so good to have you.

Stacy: Thank you so much for having me.

Randy: It is good to have you. I like the title of the book because I know when people are going through very, very difficult things, I've said to many of them what was said to me when I lost someone close and they said, "Just breathe." Because sometimes you feel like oh, I have to do something more. But no, you just have to get through the moment. What was that moment for you where you had to tell yourself just breathe?

Stacy: My husband and I, we lost our daughter, 21 months old, to brain cancer 21 years ago. I think the whole process we had to breathe. At the very beginning when she got the diagnosis, we had to breathe. But mainly it was after when I realized God, what do you have in store for me? What's next? And can I *Breathe Again*? I think that's where the name really came from. That we can take that deep breath and continue living with what God has for us.

Sheila: One of the things I found kind of heartbreaking reading through your story was

the way the diagnosis was delivered to you. Talk to us about that day.

Stacy: We were youth pastors at a really great church down in Baton Rouge. And we went in just thinking it was just something small, a neurologist's office hoping that it wasn't anything terrible. She sent us for an M.R.I. and we knew, this is not something good. But still, we were holding up hope. We're believers, we're strong in the Lord. We're going to make it through this. This is going to be okay in the end.

I remember when we walked in her office to get the results. It was all the same day. I'm seven months pregnant. Haven is in my arms. And we cross the threshold, it was that quick and the doctor said, "It is bad." She said, "It is very bad"--just those three words. And it really felt like my whole world just shattered.

My husband, who is just strong. He is a big guy. I remember him falling to his knees. I had never seen that before; just falling to his knees weeping. I remember I couldn't cry. That felt so strange for me. I think I was in shock. But I couldn't let emotion out, it was just stuck. And I just remember telling myself "just breathe" and just saying, "Jesus" over and over again.

Sheila: What was the timeframe between when you get this diagnosis that there is a tumor. You don't even know whether it is cancerous. Where was the surgery? Where did that take place?

Stacy: So we went straight to the hospital that night. We were admitted that night because they said it could be any moment that she'd pass away. We had no idea she was this sick. So after that night, we flew to Memphis Tennessee two days later. My husband and I were just talking about it this morning. How when we walked in that hospital in Memphis, people dropped us off. No family had joined us yet. He was just saying it felt like we were walking to this really dark cave and God was saying, "You need to go. Keep walking but I'm with you." It didn't feel like anyone else was with it but the Lord was with us.

That's where she got her brain surgeries, three brain surgeries. Then that's where we found out it was malignant. And then we were a patient at St. Jude's.

Randy: In situations like this it is so very difficult because especially with an infant like that, this can be a theological problem for a lot of people. How did you process through the theological implications of the loss an innocent child?

Stacy: Most of the processing came after. Like I said we were pastors, we were strong believers. I think I would never have admitted to you, I don't even know that I would have admitted it to myself, but I think deep down I thought, well, I must be exempt. I have to be exempt from this kind of suffering. And really, all Christians that believe God is good and he is a healer, we all must be exempt.

And then when we walked through this, at first I didn't question God because I thought, this is just the enemy. We're going to pray this thing through. And then when it came back that it was no longer...they weren't able to operate and the cancer had come back and really she didn't have much time to live, that's when I thought, okay, God, I don't understand what you're doing. I don't know what's going on here but I'm pressing on.

But then when she passed away, that's when the theological questions started. That's to me is when it was the hardest because we had believed. I mean we were *believing* in prayer. People all around us were praying. People would come in our home day in and day out praying. We did everything that we knew to do. And yet still, even though God's word says that he heals, and we prayed and believed, she didn't find her healing. And that is when I questioned the most. And I remember having many honest conversations with God about not understanding him and trying to figure out who he is and what his will is with healing and in other areas too.

Sheila: Did you and Casey, did you process your grief differently? Because sometimes people, I remember reading once that pain is a greater wedge than it is a glue.

Stacy: Yes! In fact, I don't know the statistics but it is pretty high for people that go through the loss of a child that end in divorce, so it is just by God's grace.

But yes, we process it differently. I was kind of stuck for a little while, and maybe that is just part of the grief process. But my husband, completely different. He barreled through. He just kept saying, "Let's go, let's go. Just pick up." And I couldn't. And I remember that created a little friction between us. A little frustration. He wasn't expressing it the way I wanted him to. And I thought, are you cold? What is wrong with you? But really, it was just his way, his way of dealing with it.

Randy: I remember another couple that has been on *LIFE Today* that went through a similar situation and I asked them about the whys of it. And they said that really for them the healing started to come when they quit asking "why" but started asking "who." The minute they realized they wouldn't understand the pain, but they understood that God was with them every step of the way. Does this resonate?

Stacy: Oh absolutely. We never really asked why in the sense of where we wanted an answer. You know you're not going to get the answer. I even write in the book, if God gave you an answer, it wouldn't change the situation and I don't think it would make it any better. It's really a trust issue. That's really what the book is about, just learning to trust God when things don't make sense. Learning that he has better in store for you. That he has a lot of good around the corner.

Something that I really learned during all this was that pain can become opaque to us. I have a coffee table in my living room that has a metal leg and I remember one night hitting my toe on that metal leg.

Sheila: That's the worst!

Stacy: Isn't it? My whole body doubled over because of this little toe; that pain was so

consuming. I think when we don't maybe focus on eternity or know that God has good in store, we tend to focus on that pain, it becomes opaque. But if we know that God is with us and we see, we know in our heart that there is good on the other side it becomes translucent, we can see through it. It's like there is good on the other side, God has something in store. I really believe that there is nothing that we will ever go through that is not redemptive, that God cannot redeem. I've seen this, it's been 21 years yesterday, and he has...his redemption has been there from day one. But even now, 21 years later, it's beautiful what I see him doing through it all.

Sheila: You introduce in your book, *Breathe Again*, you talk about the importance of worship in the midst of suffering. That really resonated with me because sometimes we think, well, once it's over I'll worship. But you talk about worshipping in the midst of your suffering.

Stacy: My husband and I are just worshippers. We grew up in a church that taught us to worship. We love to worship. And honestly, you talked about God's presence, that's how we felt it the most. Because sometimes...I remember after Haven died sitting in a rocking chair in my room. In fact, the same rocking chair she passed away in in my arms. And I was holding our new daughter, rocking her to sleep and this pain, it was just so overwhelming to me.

I kept thinking, "God--." Well, actually I said it, "God, where are you? Why can't you take this pain away? Why won't you take the pain away?" And I knew he was with me, but it didn't feel like it because the pain was just so overwhelming. And worship was the way for me to feel him. Just through worship it was--I think it was because I was lifting him higher than my pain and I was lifting him higher than the circumstance. And it just helped me kind of tune in to that frequency of heaven knowing that hey, God is right there with you. He is suffering, he is dealing with this with you. That helped me.

Randy: Would you say that the pain is gone away, or does it still pop up?

Stacy: I think that time makes it easier--and it definitely still pops up--but time does not make it less significant. It is still as significant to me today as it was back then. But yes, it is definitely easier. And I just think revelation with the Lord, because I know we've been pastors for 26 years and I know a lot of people who have experienced loss or just any kind of heartache in their life and they get stuck in that I don't understand God, in that confusion. And I think what's made it easier for me is just revelation with the Lord as you grow. 21 years and he's shown me layer upon layer how good he is. And maybe not why but what he can do through this, that's made it easier for me.

Sheila: Do you see a difference in your own ministry? You would have never signed up for this--no one would--but how has it changed you as a woman and as a servant of the Lord?

Stacy: Well, I'm going to be honest with you, if I had to go back and do it over again, even knowing what I know now and being who I am today, I would say no because it's just too painful and I would never want to put myself or my child through that. But God didn't ask me. Like he doesn't ask many of us and we had to face it.

So how it's changed me, number one, definitely more empathy for people, understanding their pain. And as a pastor, that is necessary. But not just as a pastor, as a Christ-follower because I think we live in a day where we need empathy on people that we don't understand, and empathy with people's pain. There is a lot of pain in this world. So it's helped me with that.

And it has helped me, I think stay broken because I know what God has done. There is a scripture, one of my favorite scriptures, David says, "Who am I, Lord? And why have you done so much for me? Why have you brought my family this far?" That scripture I'm probably reminded of on a weekly basis. He brought me from the depths. And who am I? So it kind of keeps me broken in that place of humility with God.

Randy: It's interesting, you referenced people being stuck and yet you say you were

brought from the depths. I know that there is no single formula for getting unstuck but what do you say to someone who is like, I've had that deep pain and I don't have the joy that she has. I don't feel any redemption in this. What encouragement can we give them to get out of that dark, dark place?

Stacy: Really, the center of the book is about moving beyond that stuck place. It's about making your pain become a crossroad instead of your dead end. Honestly, we have a part to play in it but it is the Lord's redemption that makes it become a crossroad instead of a dead end. So in other words, that crossroad to lead you to God's good promises instead of getting stuck there.

As I said, 26 years in ministry and my own experience, I've seen so many people get stuck in their disappointment, in their pain, in their confusion. I was there. I was tempted to stay there a long time as well. For me, I would say it was knowing that there is good on the other side of it.

So many people have asked me, "How did you make it through the loss of a child?" And of course, besides God's grace I would definitely say it was having eternal perspective. Because no matter what we face, we know if it is not redeemed in this life, it will for sure be redeemed in the life to come. I remember Christmas, right after Haven died, I gave my husband Casey this frame with his favorite picture of her in it. We engraved it. Or I engraved it for him. It said, "Daddy, if you could see me now." And the whole idea behind all of that was that if we would know what the other side is like and what God is going to do, we would keep going, we would keep running. I just pictured her going, "It's worth it. Keep going on! Keep going!"

Sheila: It gives me chills. I love that!

Stacy: That's that great crowd of witnesses! That's those people that are saying, "We're on the other side and there is nothing that is worth getting stuck for." That's my passion because I know what it feels like and I know what it feels like to be in that place of

hopelessness and thinking, God, how are you going to use this? But he can. I'm telling you, 21 years later, he can.

Sheila: One of the things I loved in your book was there is little moments, even in the midst of your suffering of God's grace. I'm thinking of when Haven had to be in the hospital and there is no room in the Ronald McDonald House and you're in this, it's not even a Motel Six, it's like a motel two and a half, and just how God just showed you this little moment of hey, I hear you and I'm with you.

Stacy: That was probably one of my favorite stories during the whole thing.

Sheila: Tell us about it.

Stacy: We had, my husband and his mother, because we had a mother with us at all times. You read into that, a mother and a mother-in-law with us at all times! They had taken Haven to the hospital. I was pregnant, pretty close to birth. I had stayed back in the hotel and it really was an awful, awful place. They did the best. Hey, at least it was free. We were still paying bills back at home.

So I remember I was sitting in the bathroom and I was actually sitting up on the counter because the lights were so bad, and I was putting on my makeup. Putting on my mascara, you understand the struggle is real. Right? The struggle is real. So I was putting on my makeup and this thought just went through my mind like ticker tape. I didn't really verbalize it to myself, I didn't verbalize it to the Lord. I didn't even stop and really process it. But the thought was Lord, it would be so great if you could give us some apartments like the ones in Baton Rouge called, "The Gates." It would be so nice to live in some apartments. Bring home my new baby in a place other than this awful hotel. And then that was it. I didn't process it, it just went on.

And about an hour later we get a phone call. I answer the phone and the guy on the other line says, "You don't know me, but I heard about your situation. I'm a friend of a friend. I

have some apartments here in Memphis that I would love to gift to you, fully furnished for the entire time you need to be here." He said, "It is like those ones in Baton Rouge called 'The Gates.' Are you family with those?" And of course I just started weeping when I hung up the phone.

And for me, yes, God blessed us, yes, with an apartment. But it was far beyond that. For me, it was him saying I am here and I'm making myself visible and audible to you when you can't see or hear me. When the issues around you are so intense that I might be hard to find. If you seek me, honey, I will show you myself. I will show up. I will illuminate myself in your pain. For me, that's what he did that day.

Sheila: That's beautiful!

Randy: It is. You know what I really like about that story is that man, who didn't know you, who I guess God just impressed on him that he should reach out. He could have easily dismissed that. But obviously, I don't know how much he is aware of it but he was someone who said, I'm willing to step out in obedience to help somebody. And he didn't even know he was a part of God's plan and an answer to your prayer that would be your favorite story in this book.

Stacy: I never even thought that! And that is really a beautiful thought--a beautiful story for him. He probably has no idea. I don't even know his name. We never even met the man and yet he was a messenger just because of his obedience.

Randy: I love that kind of obedience. Sheila, that actually segues into something we're talking about being that blessing in someone's life. I don't think we can stress just how critical it is. I know Stacy, those people that obeyed God and intervened in your life in some way during that time, how important were they?

Stacy: It was God moments. It was God's presence in physical form for us.

We had another situation where a man on a plane just reached over and grabbed a check out of his pocket and said, "Why are you going to Memphis?"

We told him why. And he said, "This is for you." And it was specifically a check, in an envelope sealed for parents who have children with cancer.

How did this man know that we would be there? It is just a beautiful way of God displaying himself in the flesh through people. Because God uses people. God does not make money fall from the sky. I would love it!

Sheila: Wouldn't that be nice?

Stacy: Right. It would be great. He doesn't do that. He uses people to show himself that he loves us.

Sheila: And there could not be a more perfect segue into what Randy and I have been talking about and that is that maybe God is going to prompt you today to do something for somebody you might not ever meet down here on this earth. You know here at *LIFE Today*, we're passionately committed to providing food for children who are starving around the world. Wouldn't it be amazing today if you could actually be part of a miracle? Maybe you'll never meet them but maybe you will, and they'll get to hear about the goodness of God because you woke up and listened. Watch this.

On the mission field

Open Captions:

>> We're asking this lady here if she can talk about... She lost, I think she had three children, four children. Was there a sickness or was it hunger?

>> Yes, it was hunger.

>> I had four children who died. I took them to the hospital, but they couldn't help. They died because of hunger.

>> I lost three children. They died from hunger and a lack of medicine.

Sheila: I know when I've seen pictures of malnourished children -- severely malnourished children before, I thought it is too late, there is nothing I can do. But what I discovered while I was here is that with the first bowl of food you reverse the process. The minute nutrition begins to enter the body of a child it is as if death turns a corner and life marches in.

It is amazing what every single one of us can do! So you might look at these pictures and think like I did, this is overwhelming. It might seem that way but that's just a lie of the enemy. This is fixable. We can do this. We can turn from death to life in a moment.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: I don't think I'll ever forget that trip. That was my first trip to Angola. What I began to see was "A" the radical--the radical outcome of malnutrition, what it does to a child's body where their skin begins to peel off, where their hair changes color, where there is no nutrients at all in their system. Where they're almost too sick to even cry because they're using their very last breaths just to be able to take one more breath.

But what I also saw was the villages where we've already set up our feeding programs. I made it sound in that piece, because it was my first time there as if it was a magic miracle. It's not. It's the beginning of a miracle. But it is the beginning of a miracle because when you provide a bowl of food, and it is especially made there in Africa with the nutrition, the protein that those children need, when you provide that it is as if life begins to come back into their cells and into their body.

I've seen miracles. I've seen children being restored to health. Randy, this is something that when we all do our part, we can change the situation.

Randy: It is! And so many times we wonder, God, where are you in these situations? And we want that intervention, we want that miracle. But you look throughout the Bible, throughout the scriptures, God uses his people to be that miracle, to be that intervention into a circumstance. I think he does it so that others will see tangibly God's work through his people, which is his desire.

Well, how do we turn that corner, Sheila? I love the way you put it because they are on a path towards death. That's what malnutrition does--it takes you right down a path to death. We've seen the graves, we've seen the end result, but we've also seen the change that happens when we reach out with that simple bowl of soup. That is the beginning of a new life. It is the beginning of life.

So how do we do that? Well, we partner with people just like you. For \$30, \$50, or \$100, you can help feed three, five or ten children for three whole months. Why is it that cost effective? Well, because we've been there for many, many years, close to 30 years now. We've been doing this in different areas as the need changes. We go into these emergency areas. We help stabilize the diet. That enables the people to move on from a place of daily desperation.

We can only do it with your help. And so I know, Sheila, we count it a privilege to be able to come here and say, will you go to the phone? Will you go online and give the best gift that you can? You will turn that corner for someone desperately in need. You will be that miracle, that agent of God in their lives. So we ask you, just take a moment and pray, and then act on that and do what you can. Join us with mission feeding as we save lives.

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: In Angola right now we're seeing our malnutrition clinics fuller than they've ever been. Literally, in certain circumstances there is more than one child per bed. There is mothers on the floor with children. The situation is absolutely critical right now. But we have the solution. We're in place. We're ready to save their lives. But the last and final

ingredient we do not have and that is the resources to make it possible for us to procure the food we need and to get the food to those people that so desperately need it. Open your hearts today. Partner with us giving the gift of life by giving the gift of food.

End of video

In the studio:

Randy: I hope you are going to the phone or going online and giving the best gift you can. Today, when you make the best gift you can towards mission feeding request Stacy's book, *Breathe Again* and we will send it to you.

Sheila: Because this is not a book of brokenness, through the brokenness. It is a book of hope and healing. You have lots of other resources available, Stacy. Tell us where we can access those.

Stacy: Stacy Henagan.com is my website and there are videos that go along with this, small group discussion, all free!

Sheila: That's fantastic. Thank you for being with us. Thank you for sharing your story. It was amazing.

Stacy: So appreciate you both.

Randy: And thank all of you guys for watching. Join us again next time here on *LIFE Today*.

Sheila: We love you!