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Week 11: WFL: Last week

Sheila Walsh

Lisa Harper #1

SHEILA: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm so glad you stopped by, and you're going to be really glad too that you tuned in today. I got a letter... technically, I guess not a letter. I got it on my Facebook page from a teenage girl. And she said, "My mom keeps buying me these devotional books and honestly, I think they're so boring. Is there anything else you could suggest?" I said, "Boy, do I have the book for you!"

My guest today is Lisa Harper. And so first of all, welcome you.

LISA: My cheeks are cramping I'm so happy to be with you. I miss seeing you all the time.

SHEILA: I miss you too. Lisa and I used to work together at Women of Faith. So then we traveled together every weekend.

LISA: I got to spend, I think ten years of my life, every weekend by your side, which is the only reason I'm not incarcerated right now.

SHEILA: Yeah, we got into quite a lot of trouble.

LISA: We got into a lot of trouble, but I feel like so much of my growing up, and even God preparing me to be a mom, is due to you. I'm just indebted to you. I just think you hung the moon.

SHEILA: Thank you. Let me tell you why this appeal to every woman from 8 years of

age to 88.

LISA: Belly rings to bladder control problems.

SHEILA: Exactly! Couldn't have said it better myself and I wouldn't have put it that way but there you go. It is called *LIFE*, an obsessively grateful, undone by Jesus, genuinely happy and not faking through the hard stuff kind of 100-day devotional.

[LAUGHTER]

It's so brilliant. Talk to me. What was the Genesis of this for you?

LISA: I almost blew us up. It was the beginning of COVID, and you know where we live, Missy and I live out in the boonies and all of the sudden, it was like I travel for work. Well, it was like, well, okay, these long months are stretched in front of us and I'm not a good couch potato. So I thought, I'll just do a little light landscaping. And you know, I'm single and so I have chainsaws. I thought I'm just going to cut down this tree because it would look better with a bush there, because I had time on my hands. I'm sawing this tree, the bottom of this tree with a chainsaw and I, you know me, I'm a little bit of a delayed responder. So I just thought that's odd. And I had the safety glasses, I had worship music, but I thought, that's odd. I didn't know this chainsaw threw sparks. And then, right as I thought that, I smelled propane. I was like whoa! I cut through part of a propane line.

SHEILA: Oh my gosh!

LISA: I thought after all the emergency crews came and everything and told me I almost blew us up I thought, you know I probably need to harness some of this energy over being discombobulated by just the whole world changed. I sensed God saying, Lisa, you think this season is tumultuous but if you'll look back over your life, you'll see that every valley you've walked through I was sufficient. I thought, I'm just going to go back and

kind of mine the chapters of my life, the seasons that we were laughing so hard we had tears streaming down our face or grieving so deeply I ran out of tears. I thought, I just want to go back through my story and God's story, because I believe it is redemptive from cover to cover. And it ended up being a devotional book.

I told my publisher that I always feel like sometimes devotional books are written by the saints who have it altogether. I feel like I've got to get my stuff together before I even start reading the devotional. I said I want people to feel safe before they open it up. So my only non-negotiable was that crazy subtitle because I want the woman who says "Goodness gracious! How could a perfect God actually delight in a woman like me that has so many mistakes in my back story?"

It was much more fun than I expected so we dive pretty deep. Every devotional has scripture but it's fun to live a lot of wonderful times with God, whether it was a high or low.

SHEILA: You know what's interesting, for all the years I've known you, no matter what you're talking about, no matter what you're teaching on, no matter what you're writing, all the strands go back to your passionate belief in the power of the Word of God. I almost felt like this is a safe place for some people who are thinking, I'm not sure where to start.

LISA: Right. I'm not sure how to dive into Habakkuk but maybe I could read a story. I totally agree with you, especially in our culture I feel like scripture is either maligned as a punitive rule book or it's taken as kind of a spiritual smorgasbord; just reach in and get a meme that you can put on social media because it is inspirational.

It's like oh my goodness. It's so much better than that! From beginning to end, God is always, if you get it, if you get the context, he's always restraining evil, he's always restoring our dignity. He is not a mean God, he is not a capricious God, he is a redeemer. And then he is always pointing us toward Jesus. Always!

So I see a lot of people who think the Old Testament--or talked to a lot of people who say the Old Testament is like God is a unbrowed librarian. In the New Testament it is Jesus with barrette girl Hair extensions hugging everybody. If that were true, God would be bipolar. That is not who he is. He is perfectly compassionate, perfectly holy but so accessible all the way through. It's just that we don't usually take the time to get to know the... remember that VHS-1 story, um show, I don't know if they still have it and I'm not advocating it, but *Behind the Music*? When they tell the stories from behind, why that song was written. I think we don't take the time to go, oh my goodness, this is a real story. It is a supernatural love story. Let me dig in there because it is amazing. It is not boring. It is the antithesis of boring.

SHEILA: Talking about restoring dignity, let me take you to day two.

[LAUGHTER]

So day one, I'm reading day one and I'm like oh this is so beautiful! Real happy people stand up. Happy are the pure in spirit. Then I get to day two.

LISA: You know I couldn't have that story and not put it out there! God would not have let us live that moment if we weren't supposed to share it.

SHEILA: You realize I have the photographs to prove it?

LISA: You've got to tell the story!

SHEILA: No, no! You wrote it. You have to tell this story.

LISA: Okay. You know concise is not my gift so I'll try to make this story because this story could be like a week of shows. If you haven't figured out, I'm pathologically biased about Sheila. I think she is just... she truly is one of the most amazing people I've ever met in my whole life. And you're much classier than I am. It's like one of these things is

not like the other one. But we got invited to be, kind of the hostesses at a Christian movie premier. So it wasn't a Hollywood red carpet, it was more strip mall polypropylene kind of an event.

And Barry, at the time, Sheila's husband, had this just claustrophobic little sports car. And so I was in my usual fluffy season, so I was like double Spanx; you were in some gorgeous elegant outfit. And we get to the movie premier, and remember, he parked us out at the edge of the parking lot.

SHEILA: He'd got a new car. He didn't want anybody to come near his car! We could have packed a lunch to get to the mall.

LISA: See, I was remembering it even kinder because I love Barry, so I didn't want to castigate Barry in this. So he parks us away from where the event was but I thought it was so we could fluff and get kind of better before we walked up to this exciting...

SHEILA: Polypropylene carpet!

LISA: Yeah! With like 12 people waiting for us. I'm exaggerating. So anyway, Sheila gets out just so elegantly and so smoothly, but Barry parked you right next to a grassy median and it had rained like the last several days. So you didn't know because all you saw was the green grass that it was so muddy. And you were wearing your typical four-inch heels. And she got stuck. It was like she was pinned in the mud like a stork. And you were kind of flailing.

SHEILA: Oh flailing is kind.

LISA: And of course, Barry is not rescuing you, he's taking pictures. And you are like my favorite person and like my big sister and I'm like I'm going to rescue you, doggone it. But I'm packed in the back of this car in Spanx, so it took me like 13 minutes to get out. I think I broke a nail. I finally get out to rescue you, well, I've always have been

bigger than you and I also was wearing heels. So when I go to grab you to stabilize you, I get stuck and then we're both wobbly like two sailors on a ship that's going down. And I ended up falling a little bit on top of you. Is it okay if I say what you said?

SHEILA: Oh go for it! Why not?

LISA: You just were so, just were supposed to be there and elegant. Instead, we're writhing in the mud. Sheila's underneath me and I hear this beautiful Scottish lilt, "Help! I'm peeing!" Which I couldn't stop laughing.

SHEILA: We were laughing so hard.

LISA: Just crying laughing. And so then we have to somehow get ourselves up from this just messy heap and pretend like we have it together and walk toward the event. It really was one of the most... I always have so much fun with you.

I think the thing I love about you, I'm obviously a hot mess. You don't look like a hot mess. There's just something about you that's so... I always feel like there is something about you that is so royal--not just Jesus, but you are elegant. But you never ever put up a facade. There is just this honest, I can't make it without Jesus.

SHEILA: Do you remember we never even made it into the movie because we were so muddy. We had to go home.

LISA: We were like the swamp creature! But we tried. You had to do that television show; remember?

SHEILA: I know! I know! And Tony Romo was there. It was awful!

LISA: I just stood behind you and cackled most of the time.

SHEILA: But the fact you included it, I feel so honored.

LISA: I felt like it was very holy. I felt like it was a little bit of a stretch, but I was pretty sure I could get us to scripture.

SHEILA: Okay. So some of the stories are funny but some of them, you could call, there is depth here, Lisa. This is a deep profound book. Day 62 you talk about the holiness of helplessness. Talk to us about that.

LISA: Yeah. One of my favorite living theologians and I know yours too, is Dr. Tim Keller. I was studying the gospel of Mark and you know that story where the dad of the sick kid. Because of my little girl that adores you, you're "Aunt Sheila," but I got to be Missy's mom through the miracle of adoption. Missy was really, really sick when I started the story. And so I identify with a parent who is worried about her child's physical health.

And there is that point where he confesses to Jesus, when he thinks his son is dying, he says, "I believe." In other words, "I know you're the Christ, I know you can help but I'm dying today. I'm afraid I'm going to lose my son. Help me in my unbelief." And I was studying that story and it was especially resonant with me because of some of Missy's health issues and my fear. I want to be so faithful and know that God is always good but I'm so stinking human that sometimes I forget, and I get scared.

And I was reading a Tim Keller commentary on that particular story in Mark's gospel and he said... and he's such a brilliant theologian and godly man. It kind of surprised me coming from him. But he said that it is helplessness, not holiness that is the first step to accessing intimacy with God. That slayed me. I thought, sometimes I try to come before the Lord with all of my... oh, whatever little... you know, power that I have. *Power* is the wrong word but competence; thinking he'll kind of bless that. And it's like he tells me over and over again you come to me with what you don't have. Come to me with your absolute lack and I will bring vibrancy out of void. So come to me when your heart is in

pieces. Bring all of yourself, even the messy scared parts to all of me and I will redeem it.

So I do think, I think just recognizing the fact that we can't save ourselves, can't heal ourselves, can't infuse ourselves with peace when life is hard. I think to bring that to the Lord and confess our neediness, I think that's really critical for us to have a vibrant, intimate relationship with God.

I was telling a friend the other day. I said, "It's kind of like you've got to peel off your Spanx when you come before Jesus. Don't try to hold your stomach in and act like you have it all together. You just go, "You know me." He knows the places where I've been so foolish and my faith has been so feeble, and yet he still calls me not just daughter but he's like, "I think you hung the moon." His kindness, it just gets bigger; doesn't it? The older I get, the more undone I am by the kindness of God.

SHEILA: It's so beautiful. It's almost like the capacity increases. And it is almost as if suffering makes space for a bigger picture of God.

LISA: I think that, of course, the veil, the salvific veil between us and God was torn when Jesus gave up his life on the cross. So I want to be careful with semantics, but there is still, you know Paul says we see through the glass dimly. So we have a blurry lens, effectively. You take human finitude, and you try to look at the magnitude of God, we can't see him perfectly clearly.

I do think suffering, difficulty, pain, if we bring that to the Lord, I think that blur gets a little more clear. I feel like the times that I've seen God the clearest have been when I'm honest enough to recognize how desperate I am for him. I've gone back to school.

SHEILA: Yeah! Doing your doctorate!

LISA: But just to see Jesus. I believe he has revealed to us through revelation and Holy Spirit, and holy writ, and so I just want to see Jesus bigger. Plus I'm an old mom. Missy's

11, I'm 57, and I think it is one thing for me to say, "Honey, learning is good." It is another thing for her to see me next to her doing my homework.

But I was in a class with this professor has since become, he's the head of my dissertation team so I'll brag on him because I want to pass. But his whole point over and over and over again, he says, "You have to study the Bible with an understanding that God is always in the process of mitigating evil. He is always in the process of restoring our inherent dignity as his image bearers, he's always in the process of turning us toward the true north of Jesus Christ."

He was talking about a passage in scripture, this was two years ago, it was like my second class at Denver and he just uncovered this kindness of God in a passage I had understood to be punitive. Like I thought God was kind of angry in that passage. And I was so taken aback, I thought I've been studying the Bible for 40 years and it just gets better. He gets bigger. And class was over, and everybody left. And I just couldn't get out of my chair. I was so overwhelmed that I just began to weep at the kindness of God.

And Dr. Howard had forgotten something. He came back into class and there I sit, this older woman blubbering in his class. He was kind of taken aback. I think he probably thought she needs to be in the counseling track, not studying hermeneutics. And so he was kind of taken aback. But he said, "Are you okay?" And I just said, "I'm just... I can't believe he's even better than I hoped he'd be."

I feel like that as a believer. I feel like I'm still kind of in the honeymoon season with Jesus. He's better than I ever... And God's word reveals that. We do ourselves such a disservice when we think this is boring. Or we only open it up to be dutiful. Or we use it as a club to knock somebody over the head that we disagree with. Oh it is so much better than that, so much more liberating.

SHEILA: Coming out of 2020, last year was just very, very difficult. What does the companionship of Christ and the places that make no sense do for you?

LISA: We had a... I told you off-camera because I trust you and love you. But we had someone very, very close to us commit suicide just about a month ago into COVID. So COVID had already caused most of us to be so discombobulated, at least in our generation, it was unprecedented. There was just so many personal things that were confusing, and then globally, you're like, goodness gracious, I can't watch the news anymore. I'm going to eat more carbs than I normally do. I lived off chips and queso for before six months there.

But after this suicide, I felt like just the harshness of life had kind of knocked the legs out from under my stool. And it was the presence of God just sitting there with me in that sad place. He was almost palpable. I would sit on my front porch and cry while Missy was still asleep, just grieving this death of someone I love very much. And it was, you know there are the times you go, I can almost see him. I can't see him with my eyes, but in my spirit God is right next to me in this other rocking chair just with me. The with-ness of God--I couldn't make it without the with-ness of God.

Because I tend to be a big talker, too verbose, and I'm usually running a little bit too fast, sometimes it is in the dark and it is in these quiet spaces that the static in my head gets quiet enough to actually recognize his presence. So I don't think he is bigger in the dark and the hard places, I just think I...

SHEILA: You see better in the dark.

I know that every single one of you, you're going to want this book. Not just for yourself, you're going to want one if you've got children, if you've got nieces and nephews, you're going to want this book. I'm going to tell you how you can get it. We're going to send it to you. But first of all, I want to ask you to help us with something. The last time I was in Africa, just the lack of clean water was astounding. I think when Jesus washes your eyes again and you see better, you want to make a difference. Let me ask you, would you watch this?

On the mission field:

Sheila: It's been absolutely devastating to see how hard these people work to get water and it's not a clean source of water. To talk to so many mothers who have had to bury their children. It's something that should never happen. So sorry.

Open Captions:

>> My son asked, "Mom, can you carry me on your back?" My legs hurt. My stomach hurts. My body hurts."

Then he vomited, walked out of the house and collapsed. He died right there.

Randy: This is water that will kill you. This is death water.

Open Captions:

>> When my brother and sister died, I didn't know, and I looked for them everywhere. When my mother told me they died, I didn't believe her. I kept crying and looking for them. The only water we have is from the pond. I'm afraid I might die like my brother and sister.

Randy: This is not water you can live from. We have to do as much as we can. Help us take the gospel, help us demonstrate the gospel as we bring them Water for LIFE.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: I can't imagine what it will be like to be a precious little girl, and what brings you to tears is the thought that perhaps you're going to die the same way your brothers or sisters died. But I cannot, honestly, in all of our trips, I haven't spent time with one family

where that's not a reality. I've been with mothers who have buried three children. I mean one of the mothers, in fact, you saw her in that piece, gave me the privilege of walking with her to where she'd buried her girl.

And it was just... what do you say? What do you say when the only reason these children are dying isn't because of some bizarre disease they got; and something like cancer or heart disease, or something that you could not possibly have seen that coming. But it was simply because they're drinking water that is contaminated. But it is like a *Sophie's Choice*. Do I give my children this water that's contaminated knowing that potentially it could kill them? Or do I give them no water? And there is nothing worse than watching a child die of thirst.

It is easy to watch something like that and think, well, why don't they just go to the village? That is the village. We drive in these Jeeps for hours to get to the most remote parts to bring the good news of Jesus. But I kind of feel like to have the right to bring the good news of Jesus to these people you have to take care of what's killing them first. How can you tell them about the water of life when they've never tasted water that's clean in their life?

This is something that James and Betty have been passionate about for so many years. So our commitment this year is to put 350 fresh wells, drilled, in over 20 nations. I'll never forget the day when we were in Zambia and we drove on from what had been a devastating situation to a place where there was this well and it said, "Given by the viewers of *LIFE Outreach International*"! I went bonkers. I literally danced around the well. It was so glorious. Because of you. So let's do it again.

We've broken this down to make it doable because this is the last week. We've made this commitment and we don't want to drill one less well than we promised. So for \$48 that provides clean water for ten people, not for a month, for life! \$144, 30 people. Some of you might be able to put in a complete well. Maybe your Sunday School class or your business. Do you know that for \$4800 that will drill a well that will provide clean Water

for LIFE for 1,000 people! Where else could you do something like that, that will make such an impact?

The great news is that our partners are on the ground at the moment and they're just waiting. They're just waiting for the funds so we can say, "Go ahead. Drill the wells." So please, would you call now? Would you call that number on the screen and just give what you have? And if we all do that, we can change the word in Jesus' name.

Begin video clip:

Announcer: Dirty disease-filled water. How desperate would a mother need to be to consider giving this contaminated substance to her child? For many mothers and their families living in extreme poverty, this is their only choice.

But with your help they won't have to make this choice ever again. Mission: Water for LIFE provides clean, disease-free water for thousands of children and their families giving them a life free from the fear of death. With your gift today you can help drill and establish 350 water wells this year. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five children. A gift of \$48 will help provide ten. \$72 will provide for 15. And \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime.

With your gift, we'll send you *Speak Your Name* devotions and declarations on the reality of Jesus. Filled with stunning imagery, these 40 encouraging devotions by Laney Rene serve as a reminder of the power of Jesus' name.

With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the "Be Refreshed" pitcher. This beautiful ceramic pitcher is decorated with Proverbs 11:25 and is sure to make a lovely addition to your table or home.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of

\$4800 to help sponsor a complete well. And you may request our brand-new, inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant."

This is the last week! Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Thanks so much. If the lines are busy, keep calling. Keep calling and get through. And remember, for any gift at all, we're going to send you Lisa Harper's book, *LIFE*, an obsessively grateful, undone by Jesus, genuinely happy and not faking it through the hard stuff kind of 100-day devotional. It is just awesome!

If you're able to give a little more, \$100, we'll send you this beautiful "Be Refreshed" pitcher. It's a great reminder to pray. Because scripture says that those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed. Remember, this is the last week of our drilling water wells. So we need you to call. If you haven't called yet, you've been holding back a bit, let's do it. Let's make sure we bless people in Jesus' name. Lisa, I just want to say, this is fantastic. I'm so grateful that God put us on the planet at the same time.

LISA: At the same time! I know! What a gift for me.

SHEILA: All right, so I'm Sheila Walsh for James, Betty, and all of us here at *LIFE Today*. We love you. And remember, if you need us, we're here for you too. You can call and talk to one of our counselors.

So until we see you next time, I'm Sheila Walsh saying good-bye! God bless you.