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Week 32: WFL

Sheila Walsh

Debbye Turner Bell

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh; we have a treat for you today! I remember when I first came to America watching the Miss America pageant, and I was fascinated because growing up in Scotland, none of us looked good in swimsuits, so we never had anything like that. But I remember watching. The thing that so impressed me about the pageant was the way that it supported scholarships for education. It was so much bigger than my idea. And I remember very clearly 1990 watching as this beautiful woman was crowned Miss America--and she is my guest today. So please help me welcome, another name, Debbye Turner Bell.

DEBBYE: Yes, I got married.

SHEILA: She got married! It's so great to have you with us.

DEBBYE: Thank you for having me. It is my pleasure. It is so good to see you.

SHEILA: And I love your book! I tell you one of the things I love most. It is called *Courageous Faith*, but your subtitle I love, "A lifelong pursuit of faith over fear." Talk about that, Debbye, because there is something about this idea that life doesn't happen just like that, (snaps fingers) it's a long journey.

DEBBYE: It is a long journey. And so often, people will see you, Sheila, or see me or someone else on television, they see the finished product, but they don't see the process that it took, the sacrifice that it took, the determination to get to this spot. Very often, when people see the finished product, and they run into walls or barriers or setbacks or

tragedies, it is easy to give up and say, well, it wasn't meant for me. I'm not worth it. God doesn't want me to have that. And then just throw up their hands and walk away. What I've learned in my life, first of all, nothing that the Lord has blessed me with, and I'm grateful for it all, has come quickly or easily. It has always taken faith, persistence, time, patience in everything--everything that I have, including my beautiful 11-year-old daughter.

So what I've learned over my life and walk with the Lord is that he has promises for us, and he is faithful. He will perform it. But our part of the equation is to keep saying yes and keep getting up when we get knocked down.

SHEILA: You have an interesting statement in your book that I wrote down. It said, "It's hardest to get back when you least expect to fail." I found that a really profound comment because sometimes things go wrong, and we think, well, that kind of... But when you're pretty convinced something is going to go a certain way, and then it doesn't, that's harder.

DEBBYE: For many of us, it shakes us to our very core. It makes us question who we are, our identity; question the world and the motives around us--and question God. I tell this through the experience I had after losing the Miss Arkansas pageant for the third time. So at that time--and you can read all about the details in the book, but at that time, I was convinced I was going to win Miss Arkansas that year.

SHEILA: Everybody was convinced.

DEBBYE: I was the returning first runner-up. I was considered the front-runner in the media. I got really big applause every time I was out on stage. And I come from a praying family, and we prayed about it. Words from the Lord had come, "You're going to win." So I was convinced, not in an arrogant way, but I was just okay, Lord, this is what you have for me. And it is not what happened. And it was devastating. I ended up in a fetal position on my hotel room floor, sobbing harder than I'd ever sobbed at that point in my life. I didn't understand. I remember laying there saying, God, I don't understand. It

wasn't supposed to happen this way. And I literally cried myself out. Just literally, my body couldn't produce any more tears.

And I was laying there in that odd peacefulness that comes after you cry like that, and I heard very clearly in my Spirit, I do believe God speaks to us if we're willing to listen. I heard him say very clearly, "Debbye, I'm faithful. Now get up." I have lived by those words ever since.

It took another couple of years, and I did win the Miss America pageant but the key was to get up. We can cry. We can lay on the floor and pitch a tantrum if we want to. That's very human in our experience, but the courageous part of *Courageous Faith* is having enough courage to get up and say, okay, God, it didn't happen the way I thought it was going to. It didn't happen the way I felt I deserved for it to happen, but I trust you.

What comes to mind is Job. We never like to talk about Job because nobody wants to go through what Job went through. But Job, I believe it is 15:13 or 13:15 where he says, "Though he may slay me, yet will I trust him." That's *Courageous Faith*! I don't care what it looks like; I don't care that it doesn't make sense. What was happening to Job was injustice from a human standpoint, but he knew God, and he knew the faithfulness of God.

SHEILA: There is so much in your book, *Courageous Faith*. I want to dive in. I just have to ask for a moment, what is it like when you hear your name, and they put that crown on your head?

DEBBYE: Oh, my Lord! Well, I can barely remember it now; it was so long ago.

SHEILA: Ha-ha! Not so long!

DEBBYE: No, no, I remember every second of it. It was a feeling of relief because it had been a long process. It took me seven years, 11 tries in two different states, to win a state

pageant and get to the Miss America Pageant. So there was a feeling of relief that aah! Thank you, Lord. This finally happened. A feeling of exhilaration. But more than anything, it was a feeling of, I don't know how to say this and not sound weird, but in addition to the crown, I felt a mantle.

SHEILA: Oh, I love that! That gives me chills.

DEBBYE: I felt a responsibility and like, okay, God, you're in this; that means you have purpose. And his purposes are divine, and they're awesome, and I took that very seriously.

SHEILA: Do you have to stay skinny all year?

DEBBYE: Well, I didn't. I ate cheeseburgers every day for the next two weeks!

[Laughter]

SHEILA: But your life immediately changes, doesn't it? It's like, people don't realize it is a full-time, full-time, full-time job.

DEBBYE: Yes. Back in those days, particularly, we're in a different season with Miss America now, but I traveled 20,000 air miles a month. I was in and out of a city every 18 to 36 hours. I worked seven days a week, 48 weeks out of that year. So I liken it to a presidential campaign; shaking hands, kissing babies, giving speeches, signing autographs, constantly. And having to look like Miss America while you're doing it. So no time for headaches or P.M.S. or just bad moods. Had to be everybody's image of what Miss America should be.

SHEILA: Good for you, girl. I would not have lasted a week!

[Laughter]

DEBBYE: I survived by the grace of God. I'm sure.

SHEILA: Part of your story that I really related to, I lost my dad when I was five, and it impacted me. But you and your mom, your mom and dad divorced when you were five. What impact did that have on your life, Debbye?

DEBBYE: So interestingly enough, at the time, when I was much younger, I said it had no impact. I had a strong God-fearing, Bible-preaching, wonderful woman of a mother, and she really did fill in the gap the best way she knew how. And I remember for years saying it had no effect. My home was not broken because it was single-parent.

As I matured and began to see some patterns repeat themselves and cycles happening, of course, it affected me. I think at the time, I wanted the Brady Bunch family. I wanted the mom and the dad, all the kids, the cute ponytails, and the two dogs and the picket fence. So I would fantasize when I was a young girl. A lot of girls would be out playing jump rope or hopscotch. I'd be in my room, literally drawing my ideal family; naming all the children, and imagining what their family dinner conversation would be like. Because I didn't have that. I had a working mother who was working hard to keep her family afloat.

So the short answer to a really long question is what it did: it created baggage that took me decades to work my way through. I got married for the first time at 42, and I'm convinced part of the reason it took so long for me to get married and to be ready to get married was I really had to confront some of the issues I had. I had daddy issues, abandonment issues, commitment issues, and I had to come to understand that and acknowledge it, and then trust God to work it up and out of me before I was really ready to be in a covenant relationship with the one that God had prepared for me.

SHEILA: I'm thinking of those who are watching us right now, and they're living in a home where there is no father. What would you say to someone who struggles to even imagine God as a father because their earthly father was not what they'd hoped for?

DEBBYE: You touch on a really good point. We often do regard God in the way that we regard men of authority in our life. And when that man is absent, it's hard to really trust God.

I think the first thing I would say is we all have a father, a Heavenly Father who loves us more than even the present fathers can love us. And we are loved--we are beloved by him! And although we are not really worthy of our love, Jesus makes us worthy through the work of the cross. And we don't have to feel less than or guilty. And to begin, if you don't feel that in the natural, I challenge people to begin to ask the Holy Spirit, reveal your love to me. That really is a work of the Holy Spirit, and he will do that in each and every heart.

The second thing I would say is that God is also faithful. If you don't have a father or a mother in the home, he'll provide. He will provide the counsel, the nurturing, the covering that you need, and that's what I saw my whole life. Even though I was growing up in a single-parent home, I really was raised by a village of people that the Lord sent into my mother's life or sent into our family's life that provided what I needed when I needed it.

SHEILA: It was surprising to me to read of the kind of self-doubt you had. Because we look at you and just see this beautiful, accomplished woman. You went on to become a doctor of veterinary medicine. I mean sharp and beautiful, but you struggled with a lot of insecurities.

DEBBYE: Oh yes! Majorly! If that's a word. I still do. Just as women, we are socialized in this American western culture, particularly to attain a perfection that is impossible. And then we beat ourselves up over it when we can't reach that goal. So I still struggle with that. I don't particularly like my size. I wish I was smaller, but I like French fries! And I love a good rib!

[Laughter]

But that being the case, yeah, I did. I really did. It came from, in my particular experience, living in an environment where I truly was the minority. Where what was lifted up as beauty was not my skin, was not my hair.

SHEILA: Platinum blond, yeah.

DEBBYE: And no offense to the white-blond girls, God bless you, and the blue eyes, God bless you. I did not have any of those things. And what I had was not treasured, was not celebrated in our society. So it did create a lot of this insecurity of I'm not good enough. Will they like me if they get to know me? So that was part of the work that the Lord had to do, particularly through my 30s, and working out of me this pressure to fit into somebody else's mold. And that's what it comes down to.

SHEILA: You make a distinction between success versus significance. Talk about that.

DEBBYE: I love that. So, first of all, I believe that the greatest success that any of us can achieve is to fulfill God's purpose through us to our generation. That's the definition of success. But it is not the success that we celebrate. And success in a very modern way is the accumulation of things; accumulation of awards, of money, of prestige, of power, of education. It all about me. What I get. Look at how successful I am.

Significance is about everybody else. It is about ministering, it is about caring, and it is about making the world better. And so, while success is great, and I won't turn away anything that the Lord gives to me, it should be for the purpose of significance. If we study the people that God used, even those who had great wealth, he gave it to them for the purpose of building the kingdom of God--that's significance. When Jesus said to the disciples, "Go ye therefore into all nations and make disciples," he was telling them, go be significant. He wasn't saying go be successful.

SHEILA: That's great! That's absolutely wonderful. The thing I love about that, Debbye, is that for anyone watching right now who maybe doesn't have the position in life that everybody is going, oh well done! But every single one of us can know the significance of serving through Christ.

DEBBYE: Absolutely. The truth is most of us as individuals cannot change the whole world, but we, as individuals, can change the world in which we live and who we interact with. In fact, even my little 11-year-old daughter, we tell her all the time, "Make somebody else's day better today. Make sure they feel blessed because they interacted with you." Trying to teach her the value of significance without necessarily even using that word.

SHEILA: You talk about your darling daughter, but then you had a miscarriage. Then a second miscarriage was earth-shattering in many ways. Tell us about that.

DEBBYE: Yeah, it was devastating. I didn't know if I would be able to get pregnant when I got married anyway because I was 42. We tried. We gave it our Girl Scout and Boy Scout try. And ten months in, I got pregnant with my daughter, Lynlee; and she was born healthy and whole. She's beautiful and smart.

So I was convinced that since I did it once, that I'd be able to do it again. In the churches I came from, the old Pentecostal tradition is, if he did it for you once, he'll do it for you again! Like okay, God! There was one good egg in there, send out another one! It just didn't happen.

The first one, I lost that one very early on. Before we even made it to the first doctor's appointment. The second baby I lost, literally, the day before the second trimester. I literally was going to tell my boss the next day because I was just waiting to get through that tricky first trimester. So I thought, this was going to work, and it was going to be okay. So it was devastating. My faith was high. We'd begun to dream and make plans and look at houses because we needed more space. And all these things.

Here's the thing about this, Sheila and I think a lot of people deal with this. I thought I was doing everything right, both physically and spiritually. I was eating well, trying to get sleep, drinking a lot of water. My husband was picking up the slack to make sure that I wasn't overworked. I was praying and seeking God in his Word. And we sometimes fall into this false sense of security that we earn the grace of God; if we're doing everything right, things are going to work out the way we think they are. The simple fact is it doesn't always happen that way.

So that was as much of a faith shaker as my mom's death because it was one of those things that just made no earthly sense to me. And if I can quickly just share with you, in a time of prayer, I believe that we can ask God questions. I believe he's big enough to take our questions. In fact, the scripture says: If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask, and it will be given liberally. So I asked the Lord, why? Why couldn't I have this child? And I was kind of just railing at him. What I heard in my Spirit, he says, I, and I alone determine who comes into this world and who leaves this earth. It is not your determination. So for me, it was a reminder that I wasn't in control, and I hadn't earned anything. I was living by grace given to me by unconditional love.

SHEILA: You make this really interesting distinction in your book, *Courageous Faith*. You talk about the fact that you didn't doubt God's existence; you just weren't sure about his ways. I think that's really--that's well said. And that's probably not the way you said it. But I remember my son when he lost his grandfather, he said, "I don't like God anymore, so I'm not going to talk to him." So I think a lot of people understand that.

DEBBYE: A lot of people understand that. And depending on what tradition we come from, if you're taught not to question God, that sets up this whole spiral of guilt and fear. Then it creates a wedge between you and God. So yeah, after my mother passed away, who was this on-fire evangelist.

SHEILA: And you didn't even get to be there with her, did you?

DEBBYE: I wasn't with her, I could have been with her. I was like, Lord, why didn't you tell me? I could have stayed another two days. And so it was hard to digest, hard to process. So at that point I was like, God, I know you're there, and I know you're in charge, but I don't really like you right now. And it was important for me to acknowledge that so I could process and get through it and remain in relationship with God.

Here's the thing. God is Spirit. Those that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth. He will not participate in our masquerades. He will not participate in the lies we tell ourselves or that we tell each other. So if we want to stay in communion in intimacy with him, we just have to flat-out be honest with him. Here's the thing. He knows anyway.

SHEILA: Sure! And you know what I love about that scripture? The original word, the Greek word for in Spirit and in truth, in truth means with nothing hidden. Worship in Spirit with nothing hidden.

As you can tell, this book is full of wisdom that you need. You might not be able to identify with the crown, but with every single step across her path you'll find yourself. I'm going to tell you how you can get a hold of this book. But first of all, I want you to watch something. Some people that we care very deeply about here at *LIFE*. And then I'll tell you where you can get a hold of Debbye's book. Watch this.

On the mission field:

ANNOUNCER: Happy children running and playing is a familiar sight in rural African villages. But in villages like Kenenya, happiness has been overshadowed by despair because of a silent killer.

Open Captions: There was a lot of fear in the village because people kept dying and we didn't know anything about the disease. Symptoms kept happening until someone told us it was cholera.

ANNOUNCER: It was not long after discovering that cholera was the killer responsible for so many people dying, that Gorith's youngest daughter, three-year-old Lebrod became sick.

Open Captions: She vomited the first day. The second day, she began to have diarrhea. And then she was doing really bad, so I took her to the clinic. But she died on the way.

ANNOUNCER: The impact of Lebrod's death on her other children made them not only sad for losing their sister, but it created fear for them of having to return to the same river for their drinking water that had caused her to get sick and die.

Open Captions: I was very sad when my daughter died because I knew it was from the bad water. And I want to believe to have a choice to have clean water for my family. But I am very happy seeing you today because I am hopeful we will get clean water.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: That was our commitment to that mom that we will come back and we will make sure that a well is drilled in your village. Because honestly, I've heard her story over and over and over from countless women. Because if you think about it, if your child gets a little sick, you might put them to bed, maybe just kind of keep an eye on them, see how they're doing the next day.

What you need to understand is that waterborne illness is a quick killer. You heard from that darling mom, first of all, she vomited, then she had diarrhea. By day three, she's on the road with her child. But sometimes you have to walk for hours there or sell the one chicken you have to get a ride on the back of some kind of moped thing. But before she gets to the clinic, her child has died.

I've heard that over and over and over. Every single one of us can do something. That's the thing I love about it. This isn't some guilt-trip obligation. This is a privilege as a daughter, as a son of the King of kings, to be able to be his hands and his feet. That's why we call it Water for LIFE. It literally gives life to a village.

Our commitment for this year is to drill 350 wells in over 20 nations. That probably sounds overwhelming, but you break it down because we are the body of Christ. So for \$48, that will give clean water to ten children; not for three months, not for a year, that will give them clean water for life! What can you do these days with \$48? If you can give a little bit more, \$144 will give clean water to 30 children for their life! So \$4800, you'll actually be able to drill a well.

I had a beautiful conversation two nights ago with this sweet lady who lives up in Canada and watches *LIFE Today*. She said, "It's been hard for me since my husband went home, and so I've decided in my husband's honor I'm going to drill a whole well." Isn't that awesome? You get to be a part of that.

If you can give \$48, fantastic! If you can give more, great! You can get your whole Sunday School group together and say, let's drill a well that will give a whole village, approximately 1,000 people, clean water for a lifetime!

And for any gift at all, you can request *Living Amazed* by James as an updated version. It is fantastic. It will show how God has been showing up in his life since he was just a little boy. And Randy, my co-host so often, has got a fantastic devotional called *Upgrade*. We just want to give it as a way of saying thank you.

So please, will you go to your phone? Will you give the best gift? Let's be an answer to that darling mother and thousands like her around the world. And let's do it in Jesus' name.

Begin video clip:

ANNOUNCER: Waterborne illness is a killer that strikes the most vulnerable. For many impoverished families, the death of a child is the tragic result of having no choice but to drink contaminated water. But with your help, they won't have to make this choice ever again. Mission: Water for LIFE provides clean, fresh drinking 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 for 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 James Robison's book *Living Amazed* full of inspirational true stories. You'll learn how divine encounters can change your life. In addition you'll also receive Randy Robison's brand-new devotional, *Upgrade: "Seven moves in seven weeks to a better life."*

With your gift of \$100 or more please request the N.I.V. Thinline Bible with easy-to-read large print. 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 inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video**On the mission field:**

SHEILA: This hand-dug well is full of contaminated water. It's the only source of water for this village. The mothers and their children come out here every day with their

buckets and gather water. And the mothers know there is a potential that this water will kill their children because there are all sorts of animal dung.

But this is the water that is killing these children, and that is why they need a well, a drilled well that will go down deep and give fresh, clean water. This should not be normal for any child, and we want to give them a new normal, in Jesus' name. Fresh, clean, safe water!

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Thank you so, so much! Please keep calling. I want to encourage you to go online and get *Courageous Faith* by Debbye Turner Bell; "A lifelong pursuit of faith over fear." I want to thank you for this book because honestly, Debbye, it spoke to me so much.

DEBBYE: Thank you! That means so much to me. To God be all the glory.

SHEILA: And you're so transparent, and that's beautiful! So thanks for being with us. We'll see you next time on *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh. May the Lord bless you.