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Week 34: WFL: Last week

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Dawn Barton

RANDY: Welcome to Life Today. I'm Randy Robison. Sheila Walsh is with me, as always-- award-winning author, by the way! And we have another award-winning author, and I will just tell you, if you watch my internet broadcast interviews, Life Today Live, I call it, all social medias, you may have seen today's guest. And if you did not see it, well you need to go follow us on social media. Life Today TV is our handle.

I got to talk to Dawn Barton a while back and I came back and said, okay guys, if we can get her on the broadcast, we've got to have her. And we have her!

Dawn, it's so good to have you here on Life Today.

DAWN: It's so wonderful to be here. I'm so excited. I even told you, I wore the same shirt for you.

RANDY: Well, and I don't even know what I wore on that day so you're ahead of me. But your book I thought was interesting. And of course, after the interview I was like, my goodness, this is such a story that people will want to hear and encouragement that people need to hear and then Sheila now has been reading the book.

SHEILA: I love it! I love, love, love it! Dawn won Best New Author of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association Awards. And I'm not surprised. It's a gorgeous book.

DAWN: I was surprised.

SHEILA: Really? Oh, wow!

But it's called *Laughing Through the Ugly Cry*. If you look at the cover, you look so full of joy. Your story is devastating. Why don't you give us a little background as to why you have the right, as far as I'm concerned, to speak about your joy.

DAWN: I say that I feel like I've experienced more joy than most people have because I've probably experienced more pain than most people have. And it sort of gives me the right to say it really is out there to be—. Everybody can have joy. I know somebody whose—gosh, I've lost a child to a rare bacterial pneumonia. I've been raped, and he was caught and went to a full jury trial. I've had stage 3 triple negative breast cancer. My husband battled with alcoholism. My sister passed away from breast cancer. My mother had a brain aneurism. And lots of other life's ups-and-downs. But those are some of the highlights.

SHEILA: Were you brought up in a Christian home? Was faith built into the foundation stone of your life?

DAWN: I was brought up in a house that I call "Catholic light." My mother was Catholic. My dad was not strong in faith. We lived all over the world. The longest we ever lived somewhere was three years. My dad was in the oil business, and we traveled all over. So some countries, it was easier to go to church; and sometimes it wasn't. But it wasn't in the house. So I didn't have a really strong relationship and *really* know him until later in life.

RANDY: Tell us about that. When did that happen? And where was it in the sequence of pain?

DAWN: I was young when I lost my daughter and got divorced. And then the raped happened. In that season. I say that I broke up with God. God didn't break up with me but I broke up with God. I mean like a plate-throwing angry, how could I love a God that takes babies from mommies? I was so angry. But God's so great, so cool, so fabulous. And in the details that I felt like for the next ten years he sprinkled the people in my life that I needed to bring me closer to him. And not the people that were—do you know Jesus? It was the people that the light of Jesus

was shining through them in their actions and who they were. And it made me want to be closer to them.

Then I just—believe it or not—I really came deep in my faith through Mary Kay Cosmetics, of all things. Through a cosmetic company, that’s where I really came to know him. The woman I was underneath, we’d have calls in the morning, and she’d quote scripture. And all I could think was, lady! Like, give the strategy. Enough with your scripture.

But ended up happening is that scripture layered. I don’t know how to teach motivational things today without teaching about Jesus.

SHEILA: It’s interesting to me, though, Dawn, because you were one of the big ones in Mary Kay. I mean you were so good! You were so successful! What made you walk away from that and give yourself to this whole new life?

DAWN: He’s the pushiest darn thing, isn’t he?

SHEILA: Isn’t he though?

DAWN: I didn’t do it. I would love to tell you that I heard the whisper of an angel, and I knew that it was—it was like he dragged me, and my feet were kicking along the way. It wasn’t pretty. He came to me in a dream, and I fully acknowledge that I sound coo coo ca choo when I tell the story to many people. They said you’re going to write a book, and I said no. I’m not your girl. I don’t journal. I don’t like to write. I don’t make lists. You probably need to go next door. I’m not your girl.

And he said, “Wake up! Wake up! Write this down. Write this down. Write this down!” And I expected to wake up to angels singing and probably a holy glow on that paper. But in fact it was just a piece of paper with six words, but I knew what they meant, and I knew what chapters they were. And the next day I googled “How do you write a book?”

SHEILA: Wow!

DAWN: I know!

SHEILA: And you just won best new author! That's God!

DAWN: Yeah!

SHEILA: Honestly, when I think of some of the things, what do you make of the presence of God in the midst of pain? Because I think of you losing that precious little girl and I think of your own battle with breast cancer. So many things that really could make you very easily say it's not, even if you're real, I don't like you. How do you reconcile the goodness of God and the reality of the pain you've walked through?

DAWN: I think that I had, as crazy as it sounds, the gift of experiencing devastating pain without faith, and devastating pain with faith; and they're very different. It is just so different. Crying out—God is, even in what I call the break-up years, he never left me. I feel like I just turned my back. And the other years I turned my face to his face. And going through cancer and the loss of a sister, and those things were so different knowing him, because I was still angry. God can handle feelings. He can handle me being angry. I still cried out but there was a difference.

I was recently telling a friend there was a moment during cancer where I was just done. I couldn't anymore, I could barely walk. He was having to wheel me into appointments. And I went in the bath, and I said you either have to take me, or you have to take this, because I can't. I just can't. I can't go ask for chemo anymore. I can't.

And when I stood up from that bath and that water dripped off of me, my very hard-toned body, by the way, after you visualize that, I—with it also came off the heaviness. It was like stepping out into a brand-new day. It was a holy moment. You can't have holy moments when you don't know him.

SHEILA: One of the things, the stories you tell that I found really fascinating was that during a treatment with radiation and encounters with two people who looked very different and impacted you very differently.

DAWN: Yes. I remember this so well.

So, in my journey of cancer, I had six months of chemotherapy; so I was getting the drugs and feeling sick. That was when everybody knows that I had a mastectomy. And then I had what my oncologist told me was super easy. You're going to have radiation. It's nothing. It's so—you're going to have 38 rounds of it. It's really, really easy.

SHEILA: Thirty-eight rounds!

DAWN: Thirty-eight rounds. But I was starting to get a little hair. And this is going to be easy. I've got this.

So I went in, I put on my gowns. My first visit and sitting across from me is a woman who has full color in her face. She has all of her hair and it's curled. And she looked at me and she said-- and I say that to you because I knew that she wasn't just coming out of chemo—she looked at me and she said, “Is this your first time?”

And I said, “Yeah, it's my first time.”

She goes, “Huhhh, it's so hard.”

And I'm thinking, what?

She said, “It's so hard. Your first week is going to be okay, but then you're going to burn. It's really hard. So I'm just telling you, get ready.”

SHEILA: Wow.

DAWN: And I thought, “My oncologist lied?” Like, this is going to be awful.

So the next day I go in. Same thing. Because you go in every single day. And across from me is a woman who is so thin and so frail. No color in her face. She’s bald. I couldn’t hardly tell her age because you know there’s that part in cancer where you can’t quite tell how old they are.

And she said, “Is this your first time?”

I said, “No, it’s my second.”

And she goes, “Oh honey, this is nothing. This is going to be a cakewalk for you.”

SHEILA: Wow! What a difference!

DAWN: One chose joy and to spread it, and one chose not to. And *that* is where the saying of choose joy, as cliché as it can sound, as flippant as it can sound, how deep it can mean; have a meaning that deep in such a sweet little moment.

RANDY: Given all the things...I get it. They choose joy. But on a just day to day granular level, what does that look like? What are the decisions you have to make to choose joy in the face of these things?

DAWN: I would love to tell you this beautiful, perfect formula. I really would because I would like to say even—I would love to tell you that there’s a perfect way to choose joy. But for me, God is joy and joy is God. So in not choosing joy, and not choosing that light, is that today I choose a little less of God.

Now, I’m not saying that—

SHEILA: That's a great way to define it.

DAWN: I'm not saying that there are not hard, difficult seasons when we're lying in bed. I am somebody who chronically struggles with depression.

SHEILA: You do?

DAWN: Oh yes! And I've probably spent most of my life having to take medications and battle it. But I have learned: how do you be proactive for making sure that you are choosing joy. And there is a point, and I'm not talking about the depths of—you've just lost a child. I'm not saying in that moment, why aren't you choosing joy? We are allowed to be sad, and we are allowed to go through a suffering. There's a time to mourn. There is also a time to get up and take a shower. There comes a point where maybe that's the first thing you do, and maybe it's the next day you've actually changed the nightgown. You know? Just the little things, but it is a proactive—. You know, I love the saying, and I think it's even perfect said: joy is a focus before it's a feeling.

SHEILA: Wow. I love what you say that choosing joy is like choosing God. You have an interesting thing you say, that belly laughs and ugly cries are both gifts from God. What do you mean by that?

DAWN: Well, they are. Right? If you ever have an ugly cry, it's cleansing. You feel good after. And then there's nothing better than the laugh that you just can't quit laughing. And especially at a certain age, you know everything else is going wrong during that laugh. As a woman. But it is—

SHEILA: Don't ask me how I know that.

DAWN: Yeah! [laughing] But it's just one of those magnificent gifts on both sides because you cannot experience radical joy, I don't think, without having experienced some radical pain. Because you don't recognize it at the same level. Can you have great joy? Yes. And I also don't think that--. You can be a joyful person and be in the midst of a tsunami of pain. You can have a

joyful moment. You don't have to have one or the other.

RANDY: Is there any truth to the “fake it till you make it,” or is there—

DAWN: Absolutely!

RANDY: Yeah? What does it look like?

DAWN: Well, it looks like a young girl trying to learn how to walk in heels and then she finally can. But it also looks like--. You know, when we get up and we go out and we smile. We talk about that: oh, it can change someone's day. When I was flying here, the man at security had me take off my mask so he could see my face for my driver's license, and I smiled at him. And he said, “You're the first person to smile today.”

SHEILA: Oh my gosh!

DAWN: Yeah. So, I say that because if you get up and you don't feel joyful and you go out and you start smiling and you start doing those things that you may not--. We do those things because we are the children of God. We are the light of God, and we are going to go out and we're going to spread that because that is what we are called to do. Not only when you feel good that day, and your kids didn't drive you crazy, but all the time, because that's what you're called to do. Right? So it shouldn't be based on a feeling. It should be based on who we love.

RANDY: That's good!

SHEILA: You tell a great story and I'm not sure you want to tell it on our show, but I so hope you do, of being out in a boat with your family after you had one breast removed and interesting things happened.

DAWN: Yes. Well-- [laughting]

RANDY: Y'all just go ahead. Y'all have this time to yourself. I'll come back to the show in just a few minutes.

DAWN: It's a great story. So, after I had cancer, I had a mastectomy on one side. I was not allowed to have reconstruction for another year because I had the radiation and all of this. So, during that time, I had to have a prosthetic breast. Now, I did a Facebook poll, and we named the prosthetic breast Lucky.

SHEILA: [laughing]

DAWN: And Lucky was quite frankly, the bane of my existence. He was hot. It was a "he" because—yeah, yeah. He was hot. He was heavy. He was thrown on the sofa, more times lost in cushions and under the car seat, because he was just not a comfortable thing to have along. I'm just going to tell you.

Well, I finally found a bathing suit that Lucky could beautifully fit in. Just stayed in. And you didn't know I had a prosthetic. You know? Lucky worked in a swimsuit.

Well, our dear friends, the Hembrys, they came into town. They brought their three children and we always celebrated Blue Angel weekend. We live in Pensacola where the Naval Blue Angels fly. So this is when they fly.

So we rented a boat, and this is a big boat. The children were scared to jump off the boat into the water. It was about maybe ten feet, because it's a big sailboat. So...

The mamas had this. We had this. Said, "Young cherubs, we shall line you up on the boat and you shall sit and watch our greatness." Okay?

And Casey and I looked at each other and we said, "One, two," and then, "John, are you filming this?" Yes! Casey's husband was filming. "One, two, and—" We jumped!

I'm pretty sure it was 50 feet. We jumped into the water. And as soon as I hit the water, I felt Lucky come sliding up. And I was going down and going down. And a thousand things were going through—. And I was like, oh my gosh! I just lost Lucky. Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh, what's going to happen? The water is so dark down there. I'm not going to be able to swim down to get him. This is really deep here. Oh my gosh! I just lost Lucky!

And the children are four and six and they don't understand Lucky at this point. So I come out of the water, and I look at John, and I scream, "I lost my boob!" And I looked to my right, and coming barreling through the water, about 15 feet away, comes Lucky, out of the water.

SHEILA: Dun duh dun dah! Dun da duh! [Star Wars theme song]

DAWN: And there was Lucky, and the children's faces were... And trying to explain to them what had just happened. They're scarred for life, of course. But *that* is the story of the great Lucky.

SHEILA: But don't you think that's the gift that God gives us, that in the midst of the darkest times, we get to have belly laughs.

DAWN: Belly laughs. And had I not had--. That is seriously one of the funniest moments of my entire life. Had I not had cancer, had I not gone through that, had I not had that stupid prosthetic that I hated, I would have never had the funniest—one of the funniest, top-ten funny moments of my life. So there is the joy in the tsunamis of pain.

SHEILA: Are you back with us?

RANDY: I am back now, and you can send your complaints to—

SHEILA: Send them on! Send them on!

One of the things I'm so grateful for is that you are so vulnerable and honest. You don't cover up

the level of pain. You unpack it and gift us with that. That's why everything else you wrote just rings with truth. So I just thank you for writing such an amazing book.

Is this going to be the beginning of a new path for you?

DAWN: It is! I'm going to keep writing. There's are a couple more coming out.

SHEILA: That's wonderful.

RANDY: That's good. And we're going to tell people how to get this one because if you don't have it, you're going to want to.

But, last thing, for somebody who's been watching this and they're in that really ugly season of life, that painful--. They're connecting on that level with you, but they're not connecting on the laughing part because they just aren't there yet. What do you say to them?

DAWN: Well, first of all, I don't know that we all ever have that one perfect thing to say. But I would like to say that I love you and I'm sorry you're hurting. And I promise you that there's more on the other side of this. I promise you that there's so much more. And you're allowed to be sad for a season, but you have got to move out of it because the world needs you, and the world loves you, and God loves you. So I just want you to know that. I want you to know that we miss you and it's okay.

SHEILA: I think that's one of the most powerful things I took from your book, was letting God love on you. That is so beautiful. So, I want you to know how to get hold of this book. It's a beautiful book. It's full of pictures and wisdom and laughter and tears.

But there are some people who really are kind of counting on us right now to pay attention to what's happening in their life because they need some help, and they need it now. So I'm going to tell you how you can get hold of this book, but first of all I'm going to ask you to watch this.

On the mission field:

ANNOUNCER: Clean water changes everything! Few know this better than those living in the thousands of communities where *LIFE Outreach* has drilled fresh, clean water wells. And with no exaggeration, we probably say they have many of you to thank.

But the gratitude of these communities starts with our missionary partners who serve them. This is Aimable, a godly pastor in Burundi who serves as one of *LIFE's* ambassadors to his people.

Open Captions:

>> What they're drinking is polluted water. I can even smell it. It's very smelly.

ANNOUNCER: Aimable has shared in their joy, as well as their pain.

Open Captions:

>> I had six kids, I now have four. One died last year; the other in March 2021. Their symptoms were the same: Bloated feet, stomach, and cheeks.

>> So drinking this water, I can tell you, equals drinking death.

ANNOUNCER: The power of clean water is undeniable. But triumphs of the past offer little comfort to Marie, who's already lost two children to filthy drinking water. Because for Marie, it's either dirty water or no water at all.

>> It would be a blessing to help these people with clean water. Really, really--they really need help.

ANNOUNCER: You can help radically transform the lives of Marie and so many like her right now. Help us bring them the gift of safety. The gift of hope. Help us give Water for LIFE!

In the studio:

SHEILA: We love you, Aimable. He is just, I want you to know we work with men and women of God like that all around the world. James and Betty never just went into a country and said, "We're here; what can we do?" They always look to see who is God using in this nation, and how can we undergird their work? And Aimable is just one of them. He's such an amazing man. And what he's asking for is very doable.

I mean, I've been with some of these moms. They get up at 4:00 in the morning, and they walk sometimes for miles and miles to the nearest hand-dug well. And I remember looking in and thinking, this is a nightmare! I wouldn't let my dogs drink this water. And if they don't get there in time, it's all gone because it is only about six feet deep. So they have to come back in the afternoon. It takes up their whole day.

Whereas, when you put a well in, we drill down really deep and put in a well, and it will last for 70 years. This is the last week of water, and honestly, the images of being in Zambia not so long ago are so fresh in my mind. I didn't meet one mother who had not lost a child through drinking contaminated water.

So Randy and I are asking, will you help us? People like Aimable are waiting for our answer, can we continue? We've made a commitment to drill 350 wells in 20 nations. There's a man and woman like Aimable in all of those countries, and they need our help, and they need it today. And Randy, we can do this!

RANDY: We can so do this. The thing I love about it is, you see these images of the suffering, and it is hard to watch. It hurts my heart every time I see a child, especially who has lost someone or whose health has been compromised because of the dirty water that is the only option here.

But then you take a look, and you see those children smiling and laughing and dancing and drinking that clean water. That's what we have the power to do when we come together. Maybe you can put a well into a village by yourself; on average, \$4800. If you can do that, do that and do that right now, and know that you will be radically transforming other people's lives. Maybe

you can join with others. \$144 will help provide water for 30 people on average for a lifetime. Maybe it's just ten people, but that's ten lives, that's ten children you can put a smile on their face for \$48.

Do what you can. This is the last week that we're asking this on television, and I'm asking you just to reach out today, right now, help us change people's lives by giving them clean drinking water, and you will be putting a smile on somebody's face. You can do it. Do it today.

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."

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

End of video

On the mission field:

RALPH: Randy, Sheila, I travel all over the world as the director of missions for *LIFE Today*. I continue to hear some of the same stories. Death. Why? Simply because they don't have clean drinking water. These mothers who wanted to give life to her children, she wanted to bring health to her family by bringing water home. But she ends up bringing contaminated water--if she can find any. And it brings death to her children.

I beg you as parents, I'm a parent myself, help our viewers understand none of us want to bring death into our home. None of us want to bring contaminated water to our children. We want to bring water that is going to bring them life. Please help our viewers know that they can give and be an answer to a mother's cry. I need your help today.

In the studio:

RANDY: This is the last week this is on the air so I really hope and pray you will come through. Help us reach that goal and reach so many people with fresh clean drinking water. We can do it, and you know what? We're going to put laughter on a lot of people's faces.

SHEILA: And remember for any gift at all you can request your copy of *Laughing Through the Ugly Cry* and *Finding Unstoppable Joy*.

Dawn, thank you so much. You are an absolute delight.

DAWN: Oh, it was so great being here. I've loved every second of it. Thank you.

RANDY: And your website for people that want to get hold of you?

DAWN: dawnbarton.com But I am most active on Instagram. And I truly do answer all of my messages. And that's dawnrbarton. Dawnrbaton. And the same on Facebook. So Dawn Barton.

RANDY: Well thank you for being with us and thank all of you for being with us today. Join us next time here on Life Today.