

8/25/21

Week 34: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

Sheila Walsh

"The Proximity Principle"

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. Thank you so much for tuning in.

I found myself last night thinking about you, thinking about our audience and those of you who faithfully tune in. And sometimes you'll write to us and tell us the good things that are happening in your life and share the struggles. So last night, I spent a lot of time just praying for you. So that when you watch this program in particular that you would be reminded of one hugely important thing, and that is that God is in control and that God is near to you right now, wherever you are.

I think one of the kinds of residual effects of 2020 is that many of us kind of questioning what is going on? Not just in our nation, what is going on around the world? And many of you have written to me saying that you don't watch this program here in the States; you may be watching in Australia or South Africa or so many other countries. And when things appear to be out of control in the world does it make you question, is God still in control? And not only that, does he see me? Does he see what's going on?

Some time ago, I took about two years to research the whole area of prayer because I felt as if it was one of the areas in my own life that even though I'd been a Christian for a long time, I felt it was my weakest area. I love studying the Word of God. I love teaching the Word of God and speaking, but sometimes I felt like prayer was my weakest area. And it was just a joyful journey exploring the way that people, right from the beginning, have learned to talk to you, have learned to trust that God is good, and God is in control.

So that's what I want for today's program. I want to reassure you, and not by my own

words but by what the Word of God says, that God is with you right now, that God has never taken his eyes off of you. No matter how things appear in culture all around you, you are safe and secure because God is near.

So I'm going to throw to a teaching I did just a little while ago, and then I'll come back, and we'll talk again. Watch this.

Begin video clip:

Praying women

Session Five: The Proximity Principle

Our prayer to God: "You are near."

SHEILA: Welcome to session five. In this session, we're going to look at the life-changing truth that God is always near. You are never alone.

If you've been waiting for a long time and God seems to be silent, let me ask you this. When that happens, do you still believe he loves you? When answers don't come, do you still believe that he is for you? Jesus asked if you'll find faith among us when he returns. Will he? Do you believe that God is in control? There are many things in our world I'm not sure of these days, but one of the things I would stake my life on is this: *God is in control.*

After my father's death when I was five, my mom became the anchor in my life. She was in the kitchen fixing breakfast every morning when I woke up, and she was there when I got home from school. When I fell out of trees or fell off my bike, I was a tomboy by nature, and she was there. She was the one who led me into a relationship with Jesus when I was 11 years old and prayed over me every night as I went to sleep.

Yet, when I was 16, it seemed as if I was going to lose her, as well. Serious health issues

required surgery that would take ten hours. I remember sitting with my grandma, my sister, and my brother in the waiting room for the first four hours, and then I left, and I walked down to the ocean where we lived. I felt so alone and so desperate. What would I do if something happened to my mom? Who would pray for me when I felt lost?

As I stood at the water's edge that day, I've never heard the audible voice of God, but I heard God speak to me and say this, "I am here." I was not alone, and I never would be. There is perhaps nothing more terrifying for a person than to believe that he or she is really and truly alone. I'm not talking about those who love having time to themselves. They are introverts who recharge in isolation, and I am one of them. Our best friends are a good book, a dog, a cup of tea, and a warm blanket. But that's not the same thing as feeling alone.

Choosing aloneness is far different from suffering aloneness. After I've spoken all weekend at a conference, I like to hibernate for a day or so. But then I'm back out in the world with my husband, my son, and my friends. We all want to know that we belong somewhere, that we would be missed like in that familiar old refrain from the sitcom, *Cheers*. Do you remember that? We all want a place "where everyone knows your name." Living without a real connection is really unbearable. At times we may feel as if we're connected through social media, but followers are not the same as friends, real relationships.

Or still, when we sink deep into the belief that we are physically and emotionally alone in the world, our spiritual lives take a hit. We start thinking that just as no flesh and blood person is with us in life, God is far away too. That is simply not true. Not ever true.

In the first four sessions, we looked at four key cries of our hearts:

1. *To be helped by God.*
2. *To be heard by God.*
3. *To be healed by God.*
4. *To be freed by God.*

In these last four sessions, we remind ourselves of four truths about God, realities that perfectly and completely address those four heart cries. Here they are:

God is near.

God is powerful.

God is our protection.

God has won.

As we continue to practice laying down our ways and allowing God to guide our steps, we will become increasingly aware of these truths. We will more readily sense and respond to God's presence. We will more naturally lean into his power. We will more freely surrender to his guardianship. We will rest assured that victory is ours because of Jesus.

So let's look at that first reality. The reality is that God is near. So much loneliness can be banished if believers would embrace the idea that they are never ever alone. God's presence surrounds and envelopes us: He hems us in behind and before. He moves in and through us, prompting and directing our thoughts and actions and compelling us, calling us toward righteousness and loving us, loving you every step of the way.

Now let's look briefly at the story of Abram and Sarai, two people who said yes to going God's way but who sensed a sort of spiritual distance set in. What did they do when it seemed as though God had abandoned them? What choices did they make? What blessings did they forfeit with these choices? What can we learn from them?

To refresh our memory of all that happened to them, let's look at Genesis Chapter 12, verse 1-3. *The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."*

Now before we go any further, what questions do you think it would have been reasonable for Abram to ask God at this point? What details might Abram have been curious about? Let me think. *Where are we going? How long will it take to get there? Why are we going there? Are we there yet?*

Abram might have been the very first person on earth who asked that question. If more information was given to Abram about how this grand plan of God's was going to work out, it certainly doesn't show up in the text. As is so often the case when following God, we are handed only the details we need for the moment. We're not shown the whole journey ahead but only where to plant our very next step.

Now think about this. Abram didn't have the Bible. He didn't have all the resources and revelation we have. But in Genesis 15:6, we read this: *And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.*

That's amazing to me! Like Abram and Sarai, we have two options for how to respond whenever we receive directions from God. Either we can persist in his plans for us, or we can lose heart partway down the road and veer off on a course we set for ourselves. Honestly, that's what happened to Abram and Sarai when they decided to take things into their own hands.

Do you remember? Sarai suggested to Abram that he should sleep with her maid so that he could have an heir. That wasn't God's plan. When God first called Abram into his plan in Genesis 12:2-3, that plan consisted of four components:

1. *I [God] will make you [Abram] into a great nation.*
2. *I will bless you.*
3. *I will bless those who bless you (and curse those who treat you with contempt).*
4. *I will bless all the families of the earth through you.*

That was the information that God provided to Abram, and by extension, to his wife,

Sarai. As we noted earlier, there was plenty that God didn't address. You know, when will you do all this? Abram and Sarai surely wondered how will you do this? What exactly will this mean for us? When Abram and Sarai didn't receive answers to these pressing questions, well, they did what a lot of us do; they figured they'd come up with answers of their own. We tend to measure our understanding of God's ways and God's will by the outcome we see. But God is far more interested in who we are becoming in the waiting.

Based on the lack of outcomes they saw, Abram and Sarai began to lose hope that God would make good on the promises made. It's a risk you and I face as well.

When we can't see what God is doing, we start believing he is not at work.

When we can't hear what God is saying, we start believing he's not speaking to us.

When we can't sense how God is moving, we start believing he's left our side.

And yet Scripture tells us that these beliefs are not true, that God is always working on our behalf. Proverbs 3:5-6, two of my favorite verses in the Bible say this: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.*

God will show us the path to take; He will direct our steps; He will lead us to a pleasant and prosperous end as the word *yashar* attests. *Yashar* means: To direct, to be right, even pleasant, prosperous. God is near. He is among us. He is for us. His care runs deep. He will do all the things he's promised to do in his own time and in his own way.

In Psalm 27, the Psalmist declares that out of all the possible requests he could make of God, if he could just have one thing, he would ask for close proximity to his heavenly father. The unswerving knowledge that God in his glory was near. Do you remember? *The one thing that I ask of the Lord -- the thing I seek most -- is to live in the house of the*

Lord all the days of my life, delighting in the Lord's perfections and meditating in his Temple.

The Lord is always at hand, and he can be trusted. He is good. He is God. He is caring. And he is active, faithfully working on your behalf. Most important to remember, I don't know what you're facing right now, but I want you to know you are not alone. I'm asking God to do what only he can do and just reveal himself to you just by his spirit like you sense that he is with you. May I pray for you?

Father God, just as you led Abram and Sarai from a land they knew to a place they'd never been before. You never left them; you never took your eyes off of them. I want to pray for all my sisters and my brothers watching this program, Lord, who perhaps are not sure where you are. Some of them may feel desperately alone.

But Lord, I want to thank you that your promises are true, that we can stake our very lives on what you say, and you've promised us that we will never ever be alone. Make yourself close and real to them right now. I ask in the powerful, wonderful, beautiful name of Jesus. Amen!

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Amen! Just one of the most amazing things to me is that -- I don't know where you're watching from, but I'm here in our studio at *LIFE Outreach International*, and we're just outside of Dallas, Texas. But no matter where you are watching from, we can talk to the Lord at the same time, and he is listening. He is with us. His heart is to comfort us and to reassure us.

I was reading last night in Matthew's gospel. I've been going through the gospels again and just absolutely loving it. Sometimes I'll study the books of Paul, or sometimes, I'll read First and Second Samuel and study the life of King David, but there is something so

refreshing about rereading the four gospels, and actually hearing Jesus talk himself, not just those who love Jesus sharing, but hearing his words. So if you've ever asked yourself, Lord, if you can speak to me directly and tell me what would matter to you, I will do it.

Well, listen to this. This is from Matthew Chapter 25. This is when this life is over, and you and I are finally home free with Jesus. And it says this. When it says "the king," it's referring to Christ. *"Then the king will say to those on his right, come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me."*

Do you know that those things that Jesus laid out are exactly the ministries of *LIFE Outreach International*? Mission feeding, Water for LIFE, Rescue Life -- but now we're moving to something that I find the most joyful campaign in the year. And it comes out of heartache, but the answer is so very simple and something that each one of us can do. If you're 14 years old, you can be part of this campaign. If you're ten and you get an allowance, you can be part. If you're 90 and on a very restricted budget, you can be a part of this amazing project. Watch this!

On the mission field

Open Captions:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news. Isaiah 52:7

Announcer: Through your generous support, the mission teams of *LIFE Outreach International* have extended the hands and feet of Jesus to the far corners of the globe providing sustenance for the malnourished, water for the thirsty, medical aid for the

infirm, and freedom for the captives.

But on a recent trip to the African nation of Burundi our missions' director, Ralph Done, was introduced to a young boy named Jahdu who highlighted another crucial need that countless children share.

Ralph: I've just seen so much poverty, so much sadness. One of the things I've noticed is there is no kids wearing shoes hardly. Almost all of them had no shoes. The terrain here can be really tough even walking in shoes but much less barefooted. Jahdu was brought to me here. I saw his feet and you can see the toll that it's taken with him not wearing shoes, probably most of his life if not all of his life.

Announcer: Like Jahdu children in villages around the world endure cuts and sores while walking barefoot through contaminated water, soil, or animal feces which can open the door to deadly diseases and infections including hookworms.

Ralph: You can be a blessing today by giving a child like Jahdu his very first pair of shoes. It will change his life forever. It will change his walk. In fact, I believe one day he's going to be a little champion for Christ, and it will help him even walk with God. So please partner with us to provide Jahdu and children just like him all around the world with a brand-new pair of shoes this Christmas season.

End of clip

In the studio

SHEILA: I'll never forget on one of my very first trips in Africa, just as Ralph showed you there, that we were in villages where the children had no shoes, had never worn a pair of shoes. Some of them were in real pain; infections had gotten into their feet and ultimately, even traveled to their brain. It can cause irreparable damage. Sometimes it can actually cost their lives.

But we were able to get down on our hands and knees and put these great little shoes on every child in the village. It was just -- I can't even describe what it is like when a child for the first time feels something between them and the rough terrain and the water and everything. So just to watch them literally dance was beautiful.

Do you know that through the ministry of *LIFE Outreach International* over the years, do you know how many pairs of shoes you have helped us put on the feet of children? Two million pairs of shoes! Isn't that amazing? So let's not stop there. We've made a commitment that for this Christmas, we want to put shoes on the feet of 150,000 children. Here's how that breaks down. If you're able to give a gift of \$36, do you know that that will provide ten pairs of shoes? You couldn't go into a shoe store and get a decent pair of shoes for \$36. But because we work with this wonderful company that makes these amazing little shoes. So for \$36, you will be sending shoes to ten children. \$72 provides shoes for 20 children. And if you're able to give \$180, that will provide shoes for 50 children.

For any gift at all, I want to send you my book, *Praying Women: How to pray when you don't know what to say*. It is just our way of saying thank you. I know it probably seems a little early to be talking about Christmas shoes, but the reason for that is we want to get all 150,000 pairs in early so we can have them shipped to our partners who are waiting on the ground to put smiles onto faces.

And that's the other thing that we do. If you're able to give \$500, do you know that will give a surgery to a child born with cleft lip or cleft palate? It will literally change their life. And since we began doing this, do you know that there are 2,000 children running around today who have a brand-new smile.

So let's make this Christmas not about us because who needs one more sweater, one more whatever? Let's reach out in Jesus' name. Think how great it will be on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning to know that not only are we with our family and celebrating but

there are some children way across the world who are celebrating because you made a difference. Please call now. Please give the very best gift you can.

Begin video clip:

Announcer: Poverty is a killer, and because of it, children needlessly suffer, not only from a lack of food and clean water but also from a lack of things we often take for granted -- like a simple pair of shoes. Far too many children living in extreme poverty have never owned a new pair of shoes. And while that may seem minor in light of all their needs, walking with bare feet puts them at risk with life-threatening infections and diseases that could lead to crippling consequences and even death.

By responding today, you will help secure and make ready 150,000 Christmas shoes to be shipped and delivered to children around the world just in time for the holidays. Your gift of \$36 will help provide ten pairs of shoes. A gift of \$72 will provide 20 pairs, and a gift of \$180 will help provide 50 pairs of Christmas shoes for children in need.

As a thank you for your gift of support, be sure to request this beautifully crafted, green crystal shoe ornament, a treasure to display each Christmas. With your gift of \$100 or more, you may also request this keepsake boxed set of all four shoe ornaments celebrating the various outreaches of LIFE.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help provide over 275 pairs of shoes or two children with corrective cleft lip or palate surgeries. And you may request the beautiful "Divine Servant" bronze scripture.

Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of video

On the mission field:

Betty: I'm standing here with these children and they're just a small example of children all over the world that deserve to be considered and loved and cared for. We have an opportunity to do that right now among these children and those around the world, to put some shoes on their feet, to give them a chance in life.

I ask you to help us do that. It is just a simple request but a very urgent and important one. Please join with us. You'll get such great joy out of it. I know you will. God bless you and thank you.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Thank you so much! Please call; please keep calling.

We're doing a new thing this year; you're going to love it! You know that we always give out our little Christmas shoes. For any gift at all this year, it's a little green one. But what we're doing is the ribbons on each of the four shoes, if you give \$100 represents a different ministry, a different outreach of *LIFE*. So when you look at them on your tree, you'll see one for Water for LIFE, you'll see one for Mission Feeding, for Rescue Life, for Christmas Shoes. So that will be a wonderful reminder.

And if you would like to receive my book, just say, "I would like to have Sheila's book," for any gift at all and we will gladly send that to you. Let's make this a true season of rejoicing.

For all of us here at *LIFE Outreach International*, I'm Sheila Walsh. We'll see you next time!