

11/16/21

Week 47: Fall Mission Feeding

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Ruth Chou Simons

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh, here with Randy Robison. Randy and I will have the privilege, people will send books in, and we have an opportunity to read lots of different books. But every now and again, one lands on my desk, and I realize it's really a gift from God for me because it was everything I needed to hear in this season in my life. So we're very excited that we managed to have the author of *When Strivings Cease*, Ruth Chou Simons is here with us. Thank you for being with us.

RUTH: Thank you for having me. It's such an honor.

RANDY: Great to have you. This is, as Sheila said, a topic I think that really hits people right now where they're at because the world has forced us in a lot of ways to really have to try to cope with things. But yet, this is something that wasn't brought on by COVID or anything like that for you. So where did this sense of striving come from for you that has led to where you are now, which is a great place. We'll get into that before we get finished with the program. But where did it start for you?

RUTH: Well, I like to start with definitions and striving -- striving in our strength; I'd like to say is really anxiously toiling and trying to control our circumstances so that we achieve or acquire something that we don't quite trust God to provide.

When I was growing up, I was born in Taiwan and came to the states when I was four, almost five. And living between the east and west world of western culture, trying to belong and trying to wear the right jeans. Right? You know? Like this is the '80s. And it

was Jordache, by the way. But I always tried so hard to wear the right jeans, belong. I didn't even speak English yet, working through the language.

But in my Asian upbringing, such an emphasis is on achieving and honor and performance and doing, really being known for what you do, not just who you are. But really, who you are is undergirded by your accomplishments and how well you've succeeded. And I think between those two worlds, I was given this paradigm that I am what I do and have to earn favor with other people.

So it started this spiral of constantly hustling and really trying to strive to gain what I didn't trust would come from anywhere else. I needed to make sure that everybody liked me, that I could have approval, self-worth, belonging, to be known by what I do and how well I do it. So you can imagine how exhausted I felt doing that.

SHEILA: You tell a really, it's an interesting peek into your life and your culture, but it hurt my heart reading it, of having a really hard day at school and you come home and you kind of pour your heart out to your father. Take us back to that moment.

RUTH: My dad was not a believer then, so I praise God that he is today. But when I was in the eighth grade, my dad was doing the best he could do. He was sitting at the dining table finishing up some paperwork, and I was at the kitchen sink putting away some things. And I just went on and on about my day, just like a typical teenage girl, I spared no detail. I mean, I was talking about all the boys who liked which girls, and all the drama going on. And it felt like such an important thing to me. The details were important. And my dad didn't always respond, but that night I was like, that's it! I need to address this. Why are you not talking to me? So I looked up, and I said, "Why don't you ever talk to me? Why don't you care about the things that are going on in my life?"

I don't know that he realized then as a nonbeliever how impactful his words were, but he looked up, and he said, "Because you haven't finished the dishes yet." Those few words encapsulated this whole entire paradigm, this idea that you're not worthy of attention, you

can't come near, I'm not safe unless you do your part. So do your part, finish the dishes, be somebody I expect you to be before you're worthy of my time, my love, my affection. That's clearly not what he was trying to say, but in that dance, I ultimately felt like I transferred that to my heavenly Father.

And later, when I was told about God's love, I wanted to bring all this baggage: if I don't read my Bible, if I don't perform to standard, if I'm not doing all the things and avoiding all the bad things, then he's basically like you haven't read your Bible yet, so don't come to me. You haven't taught Sunday School yet, don't come to me. And you can imagine how that would perpetuate striving and not trusting in the gift of grace.

RANDY: You mentioned you grew up not in a Christian home. When did God come into the picture for you?

RUTH: Our whole family started socially being a part of a Chinese American church in eighth grade. Towards the beginning of high school when both my parents gave their lives to Christ. Soon after that, my dad actually went to seminary, so I had some time in California.

SHEILA: Wow! When you talk about grace, I think it's one of those words within our Christian evangelical culture that we think, yeah, we get that. What was really clear to me in the way you've poured your heart out in this book and the depth you go to, because you say this is an age of opportunity for women, but we are more anxious than we've ever been. Why do you think that is, Ruth?

RUTH: By necessity, I spend a lot of time on social media working to communicate through this platform, and I see women out there running businesses; they are sharing things, they are starting things, they're running non-profits. There are more opportunities than ever to be published and to really share from your giftings. And yet, when asked, women are like, I feel like I'm not measuring up. I'm not doing enough. And even though it feels taboo to say, women keep saying even in the church, I just don't think I'm enough

for what God has called me to. The reality is I think we believe that grace is enough to save us but not enough to sustain us. So we say, O Lord, please save me. Rescue me so that I'm not punished forever for the sin in my life. But we don't realize that it's meant to sanctify and change us, transform us, and carry us all the way to eternal days with him.

SHEILA: How would you, if someone was watching right now and they actually don't know much about faith, they just happened to be flipping channels and thought you looked lovely, how would you unpack grace for them? What is grace?

RUTH: Simply put, grace is an undeserved gift of love, favor, and welcome from a holy God who we can't please on our own. So when I think about the gift of grace, it's not just a pass to avoid hell and go to heaven. It's that God chose to send his precious, one and only son, Jesus Christ, to be the only way in which we can forever be by his side.

I think about all my sisters in Christ who might feel incredibly exhausted, wondering, I'm a believer, why am I still so exhausted? What am I doing? I would say, our core beliefs turn into our actions. Our orthodoxy turns into our orthopraxy. It's just a fancy way of saying you can trace your way back. If you're anxiously striving to control your circumstances, it is probably pointing to a root belief that you can't totally trust God for the things that you think you need to rescue you. So if we truly believe that grace is the gift of God that rescues us, it would transform our everyday lives.

RANDY: Here's an interesting thing about what you're laying out. I've noticed that from the outside, the actions of someone who is striving can look very similar to the actions of someone who is just walking in obedience. You can't always tell what's going on because we were created for good works, so you get to the good works, but it is not the good works that earn the grace of God. That's backward.

How would someone know, yeah, I'm doing these good works? Am I striving, or is it coming from an abundance of overflowing grace? So how do we kind of differentiate between?

RUTH: It's always been about our hearts, right? It's always been about what fuels us. What is our motivation? I think of the Apostle Paul and the way he chose to write the epistles, the letters he's written to the churches. What is the pattern every single time? He doesn't go straight to live like this, don't do that; these are the good works you should be doing. He never starts there. What does he start with? He always starts with saying, in case you forgot, this is what God is like. This is what God has done. This is who Christ is. He paints us this amazing picture of redemption in Christ and what we have in him. And then he follows that up with, and that means your new identity is found in this truth.

So then he spends all this time talking about our new identities. It is not until after those two things that he talks about walking in a manner worthy of the grace that you've been called to. So when we finally get to the part where we put off and put on, we stop lying to each other. We love one another, we're kind, we don't hate. When we start getting to that part, the good works part, it is actually fueled out of knowing and being transformed by the amazing grace of God that we didn't really have anything to do with. It was a gift. It was handed to us. It wasn't because we went chasing after it; he came chasing after us.

RANDY: That's good.

SHEILA: One of the things that you wrote about in the book that I really related to, it took me years as a believer to understand that you get to do things you love. Because I used to think I have to do things that will make me miserable down here so I will be happy in heaven. You tell this great story, and you contrast you playing the piano and your son Judah playing the piano. I found that such a fascinating illustration of the goodness of God. Talk about that, would you?

RUTH: It is the concept of delight. I remember being a pianist because I was an overachieving Asian American daughter. Like I really spoke a few languages and played, I was going to be a concert pianist. I remember literally being at a piano competition; it was like a statewide competition. I had practiced Chopin's Fantaisie-Impromptu that took

me years to like -- like my fingers went faster than they ought to. I had this thing memorized. It was down perfectly.

And I got there, and I was so anxious about the performance. And so anxious to make sure that I win, that I look amazing, that I don't get any marks taken. That I went, just a few pages in, and I froze and forgot the whole thing.

And I compared that to my son, who is hardly, hardly a concert pianist. He's still just practicing, learning a few things. But every night after dinner, he'll just go over there, and he'll play. It sounds tender. He's like enjoying it. I think how come he doesn't have to worry about forgetting notes? What zone is he in when he is playing?

Well, there is a delight in that. There is no delight when you're trying to perform, when you're trying to earn somebody's favor, when you're trying to not miss a beat so that you will be loved, liked, that you'll get accolades.

So I realized early on that God created me on purpose for a purpose, with giftings. But if I think that those things are for me and if I'm trying to perform my way to his favor, I'll never have the delight that they were meant to produce.

RANDY: And Sheila, obviously, is a gifted musician, lots of accolades. I actually play as well, and I know about the difference you're talking about. I quit taking piano lessons because I didn't like the -- well, some of the disciplines at my age. But I wanted to do what I wanted to do and not just do what someone else told me to do. I think that probably translates far beyond music in my life.

But when you love the music, then you want to play, and you want to express. I think it's the same way with God. When we really love God, we want to do the things and express, and it is a joy. What does that tell us, maybe, about God's character that we might have some misconceptions about? Because a lot of people view God as that taskmaster saying, you missed a note there, you missed a note there. I really don't see him that way.

RUTH: Well, God in his holiness has every right to be that way. But his love compelled him to make it possible for us to miss so many things and be children that are welcomed to the table, welcomed into his arms, cared for, never ever having to do this alone. I think about how oftentimes, we think the opposite of grace is that we just stop trying with excellence. But the reality is when we are really clear, I mean, I honestly think this generation sometimes struggles to be biblically literate. We don't necessarily even go to the Word and understand grace as it really is. We kind of have this idea of God that we learned from cute little Instagram posts rather than really knowing the God of the Bible.

And so if we were to really understand the gift of grace, and the groundwork from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, that it was his plan all along. The entire Bible is the story of God's love for us. So if we were to go there, then I think we would realize that grace compels us. The gift of grace doesn't make us lazy. It doesn't make us say, well, then it doesn't matter. I can just play all the bad notes I want. But it actually compels me to want to use every fiber of my being to live a life that is in a manner worthy of how great and amazing that grace is.

So we sing "Amazing Grace" all the time, but I spent so much of my life almost changing the words going, God, help me be amazing so that I don't need grace. I just really want to be amazing myself. So my heart is to help this generation really re-receive the grace of God for how amazing it truly is.

SHEILA: I love the way you unpack the story in Luke 15. We traditionally call it "The Prodigal Son." But you unpack it in such a way of what it reveals about the father. It's pretty amazing.

RUTH: It was fascinating to me. Sheila, I remember the day that I was writing--I wrote this book during COVID, and so I spent a lot of time at home. But the day I was researching and really getting sources on this, I wept as I was writing.

I hope the reader sees how much I was, like working through it myself. But I had missed the imagery for so long that in ancient Jewish culture, a son that's done what the prodigal son did, like lost his inheritance and comes back, that the townspeople are supposed to go meet him at the gate. The dad stays back, and the dad broods, sits in his room, and basically waits for the whole town to go to the gate. And there's a ceremony, and I'm not Jewish, I can't pronounce it perfectly, kezazah, I think. And then you break this pot, and the broken pot basically signifies you're not wanted any longer. You've already ruined it. You've messed up your inheritance. You are no longer welcomed into this community that we are. And the dad sits there and waits for that ceremony to be taken care of.

So when we read about the dad pulling up his loincloth, tucking it in, running, showing his legs, burying the shame, it would have been shameful for him to run across town showing his bare legs in this culture, and for him to do that, it was so remarkable for me to realize, it was so he could beat the townspeople to the gate, and bear that shame and say, "No breaking of the bond. He's welcomed home by me, the father." That, to me, changes everything. That's grace.

SHEILA: That brought me to tears reading that because it's just the father made himself, willingly made himself a spectacle so that the son would not be. That's just overwhelming. When somebody finishes reading your book, Ruth, what do you pray they take away from it?

RUTH: I pray first and foremost that there will be utter awe and wonder for God our savior. Because I think true worship leads to real new life. If we don't worship first, if you put that book down and you immediately go out and feel like I've got the formula to do my life right, you've missed the whole point.

SHEILA: Totally!

RUTH: But none of us like books that don't tell us formulas. I don't wish, but sometimes I think, gosh, I wish this book was like ten next steps to make your life amazing and

count. Right? But hopefully, what you discover, instead, is that God's called us to a tender, surrendered relationship in which he does what you never could on your own. So when you close the last page of the book, I pray the first thing that you do is fall on your knees, look up and say, what wondrous love is this that would come and save me? And from there, you can stand renewed, changed with strength in your own weakness and not wish that weakness away but actually welcome it and know that you can lay your strivings down because His grace is so much better.

RANDY: Sheila, I would love for people to get this book. In fact, we'd love to send you Ruth's book and just really get into the detail and unpack just what God's done for us.

But we want to ask you to do something in that process as we reach out to help people who are hurting. So watch this and pray about how you can be involved. Again, we'll send you Ruth's book today when you support mission feeding. Watch this.

On the mission field:

OPEN CAPTIONS:

Pandemic No End in Sight

War on Terrorism Continues

Health of Economy in Question

ANNOUNCER: With all the problems facing each and every one of us, it would be very easy to pull back and close our eyes to the plight of children in this world. Children who, through no fault of their own, are suffering because of the lack of food.

ISAK: We're here in an area of Northern Mozambique. We've been going from village to village. We've been speaking to mothers in all of these villages. And there is one common thing that these mothers have been sharing with us, and that is the fact that they have no food. Many mothers have told us how they've lost children as a result of simply not being able to feed their children.

The situation here is at a crisis level. Children die simply because there is not enough food. In Angola, we're seeing multi-years of drought; we've actually just this week got a report from our staff in Angola showing that over 200 percent increase in the number of children being admitted into the malnutrition clinics there. We know that more children coming in and being admitted into malnutrition clinics doesn't just mean a statistic. It means more mothers whose hearts are broken.

In South Sudan right now, we're seeing flooding. We've got malnutrition clinics that, because of your love, we've been able to rebuild, but there are many that we still need to rebuild. And if we're not able to rebuild those clinics, we're not able to extend the lifeline that those clinics give to the mothers and the children that so desperately need it. Many of those mothers are relying on us, counting on us.

Please, it's a crisis situation here, but it is a situation that we can turn around. We can change these conditions because the solution is food. The solution is opening our hearts, bringing a heart of love and a pipeline of food because that literally is the gift of life.

OPEN CAPTIONS: There's LIFE in every bowl and hope for every life.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: I'll never forget my first trip to Angola, my first trip to a malnutrition clinic. Sitting on the edge of a bed beside a young mom and looking at the little one she was holding, so desperately fragile, too exhausted to even cry, red hair, which I understood later was a lack of protein. I remember looking in the mother's eyes, and she didn't understand my language and I didn't understand hers. But there was a language we both understood, and that is that we were both mothers.

It's the most instinctive thing. It is as deep as the marrow of your bones, if you're a mom,

that you want to make sure that your children are well-fed, that they're clean, that their hygiene is attended to, that they sleep well at night, that they have a hope and they have a future. What I saw in the eyes of that mom in that malnutrition clinic was hopelessness because it was as if every door had been slammed in her face and there was nothing she could do.

But then the next day, we drove on a few hours to a village where we already had established a mission feeding program, and it was another world. It was just a few miles away, but it was another world where children were given a bowl of this nutritious food, specially made for their needs in that region of the world. There was life in their eyes and life in the teacher's eyes. There was joy; there was hope!

We have made a commitment this year to be able to feed 350,000 children. Our partners are on the ground, like Isak that you just saw. He's aware of all the needs, and he's asking us to help. So, Randy, we can all do something.

RANDY: As Isak said, we can turn this around, and we can make that claim because we, with your help, have been doing it for decades now. We know what it takes to go into these places, whether it's been hit by famine or a flood or some other condition out of the control of the people that have damaged the crops, brought in sickness, and set them right on the edge of death. So we've gone into these places now for many, many years and turned it around.

Now we can only do it with your help. We go in with the food. You see all the pictures where Sheila's been there, I've been there, all our partners are there, we're dishing out these bowls of, it's a specially made, we call it "soup" but it is a thick nutritional thing designed to stabilize someone's diet so they can get back on their feet.

How do we do that? We do that with your support. And it breaks down like this, generally: \$30 will feed three children for three months. \$50 will feed five children for three months. Your gift of \$1,000, if you can do that, would feed 100 children for three

months. We know this because we've done it. But we can't continue to do it without your support, and that's why we come to you right now. When we say it goes to the phones, go online, give the best gift you can, pray about it, say, God, what would you have me to do? Because when we come together in Christ's name and reach out with love to sustain these people, to get them back on their feet, to show them -- not just tell them, we do tell them -- but to show them the love of Christ, this is how we change the world one life at a time. So I'm asking you to do the best you can and do it right now.

Begin video clip:

ANNOUNCER: Across the continent of Africa, children are suffering, facing severe malnutrition and even death. With food reserves gone and many areas experiencing severe famine, we urgently need to replenish supplies to keep feeding the 350,000 children who are counting on us.

Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 to help feed and care for three, five, or ten children for three full months. Also, please consider an extra gift to help immediately rebuild malnutrition clinics destroyed by record flooding in South Sudan. This urgent need is \$392,000 above our normal feeding budget and is critical to help save the lives of those suffering most.

With your gift of any amount, we will send you *Christmas Grace*. This eye-opening, new 31-day devotional will give you a fresh perspective on the greatest gift ever given and the life-transforming hope found in Christ's birth.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "Love and Thanks" tumbler set with scriptures reminding us that "God's love never fails" and to always "Give thanks." These tumblers will keep drinks hot or cold wherever you go.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant."

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

End of video

In the studio:

RANDY: I pray you will give the best gift you can. And don't forget, we are rebuilding those clinics, and that makes a huge difference. Sheila, I would love to send people Ruth's book today.

SHEILA: Yeah! For any gift at all, please request Ruth's book. Honestly, it's great! I got so much from it. So Ruth, I just want to thank you for writing this! And thank you for being with us today.

RUTH: Thank you so much for having me.

SHEILA: We loved it. And we will see you all next time on *LIFE Today*. God bless you!