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Week five: WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Philip Yancey #2

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Sheila Walsh is with me, and we are very, very excited because this is the second program that we have a chance to talk to Philip Yancey. Many of you know his books. There is a litany of wonderful books to help us grow in our faith. But this one, *Where the Light Fell*, is very personal. If you missed the first program, I urge you to go online at LifeToday.org; you can watch all our programs there. But this is very special. Philip, we're thrilled that you would stay for a second program and honored to have you here at *LIFE Today*.

PHILIP: I came a long way. I'm happy to stay for another program.

[Laughter]

SHEILA: I've read *The Jesus I Never Knew*, *Disappointment With God*, *What's So Amazing About Grace*, but I found it intriguing that you wrote about this one; that you feel like you were put on the earth to write this book. Why is that?

PHILIP: It took me a long time to realize it, but now I'm aware that I was given a great gift. The gift was I grew up in an extreme church; I grew up in an extreme family at an extreme time of history, the 1960s, where everything was up in the air. And for a writer, that's great material. [Laughing] But not only that, I was able to be kind of ahead of the curve on a lot of people who today are starting with the church and leaving the church. I have a friend who studies these things. He says there may be as many as 25-30 million exvangelicals, people who used to be

evangelicals and they just walked away from it for a lot of reasons. Often, the church did something to offend them or whatever.

When I hear their stories, I just kind of sit back and laugh and say, oh, it's much worse than that. Let me tell you my story. My story is a story of hope. The message is don't throw out the baby with the bathwater. Yeah, the church does a lot of crazy things, and sometimes people are judgmental, and sometimes there are a lot of wounds that you carry away. That's true; I agree. I had those. But it is a bad trade if you decide because of those people who treated me this way, I'm going to cut off any contact with the God of the universe -- that's a bad trade.

The church, when I look at it, the church is God's greatest gamble. God turned the whole message over to us. Sometimes I say, if I were God, I wouldn't have done it that way. The whole story of the Bible is kind of God doing it in his own way in the Old Testament, and then Jesus, Jesus said, okay, I've done my job, it's up to you now. So, Moses, you showed these videos of water that you're creating water for people. In the old days, Moses would just knock on a rock, and the water would spring out. It doesn't work that way anymore. God turned it over to us, and it's up to us to bring God's love and God's message of peace and caring and compassion and reaching out to the suffering. It's up to us. That's God's plan. I don't think God enjoys doing everything by himself. He deliberately enjoys seeing God's children do the kind of work God wants to be done in the world.

RANDY: You touched on something just now that I really think is important. There is another quote in your book, and I'm going to butcher it slightly, but you'll get the idea. You say that an idea is not responsible for those who claim to hold to it. I've experienced some of this, certainly not in my family but in the church where you get these wrong ideas, often from people who claim to speak for or represent God? Yours were so extreme that it kind of helped me go okay, I get what he's going through. Racist ideas -- I mean just flat-out evil heresy being taught from the pulpit repeatedly. As well as some examples of cruelty, unkindness, legalism, obviously.

How did you begin to untangle and deconstruct these bad ideas that were coming from people who claim to serve God or even speak for him in order to find out the truth? How did you do it?

PHILIP: I was very blessed by finding some people who balanced those off. Early in my career as a journalist, I started writing for a teenaged magazine called *Campus Life*, and my first book was a book called *Where is God When It Hurts?* So you can see kind of where I was. My first book was *Where is God When It Hurts?* Then came *Disappointment With God*. I was --

SHEILA: There is a theme here.

PHILIP: It took me a long time to get to things like Jesus and grace. I just wasn't ready. But in that, there was kind of a cocoon period.

I met a man named Dr. Paul Brand. We wrote several books together. He was a saint, truly a saint, the wisest, most brilliant person I've ever known. He was actually offered to be the head of orthopedics at Stanford University Hospital or Oxford University Hospital. He turned them down to work among some of the lowliest people on the entire planet. These were people in the untouchable caste, as it was called back then in India, who had leprosy. He could have stayed up here. Instead, he went.

I've never met a person more full of gratitude and joy and more engaged with life. Early on in working with him, I decided, at first, I thought, I know what I'll do, I'll be an investigative reporter like Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. I'll expose these corrupt people. I'll find some Christians and expose them. And then I did a little bit, and I thought, this is no fun. You had to be around jerks all day to write about them. I want to be around people that I want to be like, that I want to become.

So for ten years, I could write with great integrity about Dr. Brand's faith while mine was still taking shape. That was a cocoon period for me. For people in that state, Randy, it really only takes one person who truly is a Jesus follower in the best sense of the word whose life is full, free, compassionate, and who has more time for you. It only takes one person like that to realize, yeah, that's what we were supposed to be; that's what God had in mind in creating human men and women.

I would just say find the kind of people you want to be like and hang around them. There is a book by David Brooks. It came out a couple of years ago. He talked about the difference between resume virtues and legacy virtues. The resume virtues are the kind of things that we accumulate. Where did I go to school? What kind of car do I drive? How much money do I make? He said when I go to funerals, nobody talks about that. They don't stand up and say, this is how many shares of Microsoft he owned. No! They talk about he was kind, he was generous, he was charitable.

We should be spending our time looking for people living out those virtues. It just takes one who can mentor you, as Dr. Brand was to me. Or it at least gives you a picture of what Jesus had in mind. If you spend your time harping on Christians who make mistakes, there are plenty of them around. You can find them. This is nothing new. Read the book of Corinthians in the New Testament. It started early. You started with that quote, "An idea cannot be held responsible for those who believe in it." Don't blame God for the church. It's not his fault. As a matter of fact, it is just a great act of humility that God would trust us with the good news, with the message. He wants us to grow up and be not children but adults, disciples following Jesus.

SHEILA: Why do you think the word *evangelical* leaves such a bad taste in so many people's mouths these days?

PHILIP: Whoa! That's a dynamite question. [Laughing] One reason is that it has become so skewed with politics, like the media, Time Magazine. When you say the word *evangelical*, all they think of is a political lens. That's not what the word means. The word means good news. You can never pin Jesus down on politics. People would say, ask a question, how political should we be? He would say, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God, the things that are God's." What did he just say? It doesn't really solve it. He's throwing it back and saying, people are going to end up on different sides on this thing, but it's up to you to figure that out.

Funny thing, Jesus nor Paul, I never see them talk about here's what you need to do to clean up

the Roman empire. The Roman empire is in a mess; we've got to straighten this thing out. He never did that. He just said show people a better way to live. And there is theologian, Stanley Hauerwas, who says our job in the church is just to be the church. That's how Christianity spread in the Roman empire.

In those days, it was worse than abortion. They would let babies be born and just leave them out on the side of the road for wild animals or the weather to take them. And the Christians would adopt those babies; they had a platoon of wet nurses to keep them fed, and then they would adopt them. And when a pandemic would hit, bubonic plague, the Romans would run up into the hills. The Christians would stay behind, and they would nurse not only their relatives but their pagan neighbors' relatives.

After a while, people in Rome said, "I like the way they live better than the way I live. I want what they've got." And I think that's, primarily, that's why it is called evangelical, "good news" so that when you look at a person like that, boy, they seem fulfilled, they seem happy, they seem compassionate. So I want what they have.

RANDY: And they did what had to have seemed impossible in Bible times as we think of them. They flipped the Roman empire.

PHILIP: They did. It took about 300 years, but they started with just this little group, and they were considered a tiny little branch of Judaism, which wasn't all that respected in Rome. And then, in 300 years, more than 50 percent of the people identified as Christians, including the emperor.

SHEILA: Wow! In reading your story, which Philip's book *Where the Light Fell*, is a memoir, one of the things I thought had to be the hardest struggle is your mom, Bible teacher, you're camping on the grounds of the church. You literally can't get away from the church, and everyone there thinks she is a saint, and you're living with the Mr. Hyde part. So I wondered how did you eventually resolve that? Were you able to kind of... did you ever have a settlement with your mom in terms of saying to her, that made no sense to me? Or was she ever sorry?

PHILIP: We've had some good conversations. She still is uncomfortable with where I am. She doesn't read my books. When I found -- when I learned the circumstances in which she was raised, this happens so often; they were worse than anything I endured as a child; and probably, her grandparents the same thing. I tell part of their story there. I came to have sympathy for her. She was truly serving God, planning to be a missionary, and then boom! Just terrible tragedy in which she had a part; her husband's death just changed everything. She had to scramble like crazy working three jobs. Single parents, we all know how hard that is, and she just wasn't prepared. And when we started turning out a little differently than she hoped, in some ways, she went off the rails. She kind of lost it.

SHEILA: I think of the number of, my son is about to turn 25. I think a lot of people his age are kind of walking away from the church. What is your thought on that? Why do you think so many of that age group are kind of what they call deconstructing any faith they had?

PHILIP: Well, first I would say, this isn't the first generation that's happened to. We go through order and then disorder and then reorder. Order, mostly you believe the things people tell you growing up, your church, your parents, and I did. And then I found out some of them were flat-out wrong, as you've mentioned, Randy. So what do you do? I went through this period of disorder, maybe four or 5 years, where I'm not sure I believe any of this stuff. I just threw it all out.

Parents, when they see that, sometimes freak out. But we all have to go through that. Let's get to the reorder phase. Now I've been able to do that in my writing. That's my career, just picking up these things and figuring out what do I keep? What don't I keep? Often, when they become parents themselves when they have to explain death, God, to a three-year old, you need help. You need help. And often, they will go back to that church. I think that's not an unusual pattern.

What we need to concentrate on is not making it easy for them to leave the church. How do you make it easy? You make it easy by being mean to someone who is going through a divorce or even a gay person or judging them because they have a different view on wearing masks than

you do. It's amazing how churches divide over the funniest things, whether to paint the building white or not.

RANDY: It literally happened!

PHILIP: It literally happened! Yeah, the church my father, his funeral service was conducted at split over that, painting the bricks white. Maybe we should leave churches like that. Actually, my mother did. As people who are part of the church, let's not make it easy for people to walk away. We should be the kind of people where they say, I need them. They're my community. I know that when I'm in trouble, I can go to that church. And the church is actually pretty good at that. When a house burns down, when somebody is in trouble, when there is an alcoholic in the family, and you need help, who do you call? You call the church.

RANDY: At the same time, you have helped all of us understand the grace side of things, more of which is needed to make it harder for people to leave the church. But you've always sought truth; you've never sacrificed truth for the sake of grace.

PHILIP: You're right. Yeah. Just the other day, I read a story of a man who has been a chaplain in a prison for 14 years in New Mexico. He said, most of what I see in that prison, I've never met a single person who really felt blessed by their parents, especially their father. And he went on to say, and I've looked at this, God actually spoke audibly, in a way you can hear in the New Testament in the gospels four times. And he said exactly the same thing every time. He said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased." Starting at Jesus' baptism all the way to the crucifixion. "This is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased." And this chaplain went ahead and said, these guys, because he was dealing with guys in prison, have never heard, "This is my beloved Son."

What God is saying is, do you see that? That's my boy! Jesus, that's my boy! He makes me proud. He pleases me. Sometimes, I do this little exercise at the end of the day. I'll lie in bed and think, did I do anything today that gave God pleasure? Then I think, did I do anything today that gave God displeasure? That usually comes much more quickly. But I think that's why we're here.

We're here to give God pleasure. And that's the grace that God extends to us. God wants us to be obedient. God wants us to live the way the Bible spells out but not out of fear but out of a desire to please the one who gave us life in the first place.

It's a question of motive. We end up with the same morality, but there is a big difference when you say if you don't behave yourself, I'm going to... Rather than, oh, please! Show me how you can please me. There is a huge difference in motivation.

SHEILA: Well, you wrote out of a lot of pain in this book. But you are right; it is a book of hope and a book of redemption. And honestly, I cannot recommend this book highly enough. It's really very inspirational. Perhaps it'll put some of your life in context, too, let some of the jigsaw pieces fall into place.

We would love to send this to you. Let me tell you how we're going to do that. First of all, there are some people at the moment who are struggling with the most basic of needs, to be able to provide clean water for your children. They're not asking for new iPhones; they would just like to have clean water. So you and I have this incredible joy of actually being a part of the answer. So watch this, and then we'll tell you how you can get your own copy of *Where the Light Fell*.

On the mission field

RICK: Jeanne, I wanted to show you where this village collects their water. It's just incredible. Look! It's only a couple inches deep -- just a few inches deep, and you can't even see the bottom.

JEANNE: Oh, my goodness!

RICK: This is an area that last year had a cholera outbreak, and over 20 people got killed -- died from cholera.

ANNOUNCER: Cholera is an intestinal infection caused by ingestion of food or water

contaminated with the cholera bacterium. And it can kill a person within hours.

OPEN CAPTIONS

>> I lost my child because of cholera. We faced this disease here because of the unclean water.

ANNOUNCER: Rural villages in African countries like Burundi often have no access to clean water. And when animals and people share a dirty water supply, a cholera outbreak can be imminent.

OPEN CAPTIONS

>> We lost many persons. We are always burying people.

ANNOUNCER: Cholera still remains a global threat, especially in the worlds' poorest countries. Over a billion people are at risk, and children under five years old account for more than half of the global incidences and death.

RICK: Kids and people should not be drinking this dirty water at all.

JEANNE: Disease, pollutants of all kinds come into this water, and it's just flowing all through this whole valley, isn't it?

RICK: All through the whole valley.

JEANNE: And this is it for them.

RICK: They desperately, desperately need clean water. We have to have wells. We have to!

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: I remember the first time I stood at the edge of one of those rivers, and the thing that

shocked me was the children were bathing in it, they were also drinking water from it, and just a few yards away from me, there were animals in the same -- the very same water. I watched as this darling mother gathered up water in a bucket, and I followed her back to the village with her two little ones behind her. They sat down, and she poured out cups of water, and they all drank from it. And something in me just -- it's like everything in you wants to say no! Until you realize how arrogant! It's all they have.

And that's why I'm so grateful to be part of what James and Betty started a long, long time ago. They look to see who is God using in this nation and how can we underwrite this work? Water for LIFE is literally that. On my last trip to Zambia, I spent days with mothers who gave me the privilege of walking to where they had buried their children and kneeling with them there. And then the following day, we'd go to where there is a well put in by the partners of *LIFE Outreach*. And then you see children laughing, smiling, a sparkle in their eyes. And we need to do that in 20 nations this year. So that's been our commitment to drill 350 new water wells. You can help us.

RANDY: Your gift today of is \$144 will help provide water for 30 people on average for a lifetime. We've been doing this, as Sheila said, for so many years. We have seen the effects. It turns lives around. It restores health to sick people. Do you know what that does? That demonstrates this unconditional love that God gives to all of us. We very often have to answer the question, why are you here? Why are you doing this? And that answer is God's love.

So will you join us in not only providing Water for LIFE but providing an example of the love of Jesus Christ all over the world? \$48 will help provide water for ten people for a lifetime. Many of you can provide an entire well. The average price there is \$4800. It varies from region to region but on average, that's what it is. If you can provide a whole well, you will change a whole village, you will change lives, you will absolutely save lives.

Sheila and I have seen the effects. We have seen a positive change in people, and it happens quick. And we can do it with your support. Will you do it now? Will you go online, on the phone, call us, give the best gift you can to provide Water for LIFE.

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 *Bible Promises For Life*, the ultimate handbook to everything God guarantees you in his word. A powerful resource that will give you the confidence to face life's troubles. With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the "I Will Give You Rest" throw. It is a reminder of our Savior's promise of rest to those who trust in His grace and love.

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. You may request our new, inspiring bronze sculpture, "Let the Children Come."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

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

Sheila: I'm here on a beautiful continent of Africa. And in this village, like so many other villages that I've been to, there are children dying all the time simply because there is no clean water source. But the situation here is dire. I've talked to so many mothers since I've been here who have buried one, two -- one mother has buried three children simply because they have no

clean water source. There is hand-dug wells but I've looked at the water, it is filthy! But it doesn't have to happen.

When we drill a fresh water well, it goes deep down to water that will not run out during the dry season like we have here. It will be sustainable. It is sealed in where the water is fresh. I want to thank our partners for what you've done. But there is so much more that we need to do. Let's change this in Jesus' name and bring a cup of water, clean water, Water for LIFE in the name of Christ.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Thank you so much! If the lines are busy, keep calling. Let's do this. It's not asking a lot. God just wants us to give some clean water to people who desperately need it. And for any gift at all, you can request Philip's book, *Where the Light Fell*. You will thoroughly enjoy this.

RANDY: Oh my goodness, yes! Philip, can I just say not only thank you for writing the book but thank you for taking the time to share it with our audience.

PHILIP: If I had to summarize it, I would say this, Randy, a phrase I got from Dallas Willard. He said, "For those who love God, nothing irredeemable can happen to you." Nothing that cannot be redeemed. A lot of bad things are going to happen in life, some caused by the church, some caused by families. I tell my own story, but all of it can be redeemed. It is a book of hope.

RANDY: It's beautiful! Thank you so much. He's talking about you. So thank you for joining us this time. We'll see you again next time on *LIFE Today*.