

2/3/22

Week six: WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Robert J. Morgan

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison; Sheila Walsh is with me as always. Many years ago, it's been 15 years or so, maybe more, we had a book that we offered on *LIFE Today* called *Then Sings My Soul*, and it was about the great hymns, the stories behind them. Our audience just loved that. And the author of that was Robert J. Morgan.

Recently, on my *Life Today Live* program that I do every day at noon online, I interviewed Robert J. Morgan because he's got a new book called *Great is Thy Faithfulness*. So after that interview, I just knew I had to share him with our broadcast audience. So Robert, great to have you on *LIFE Today*.

ROBERT: Thank you, Randy. I'm thrilled to be here.

RANDY: Now, this book has a hymn title, but this is a much more personal journey for you. For those who don't know all that you've been through, take us back a few years and share your journey with us.

ROBERT: Yes, well, Sheila and Randy, my wife Katrina and I were married for 43 years. She was from Maine, and I was from the mountains of east Tennessee. We were very different, but the Lord put us together. She was just the best wife for what I needed that anybody could possibly have. I still look back and marvel that that happened.

She developed Multiple Sclerosis after our girls were elementary age. We had three daughters. So, as time went by, she progressed slowly from being ambulatory to being on a cane, going to a walker, and then to a wheelchair. And finally, being unable to transfer herself and pretty helpless

the last 10 or 15 years of her life. So I became her caregiver. We became caregivers to each other because that's a two-way street. But she passed away.

Now she had been going down, and the month before, I'd rushed her to the doctor. He thought she was not going to make it. We called the girls in, she was failing, and I said, "Doctor, would you mind if we have prayer?"

This was at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. He said, "Would you mind if I led you in prayer?" He led us in the most wonderful prayer. And Katrina's eyes opened, and we had another month with her.

But then, at the end of that month, it was evident that the Lord was taking her to heaven, and she passed away on 11/11, November 11th, Veteran's Day, at 11:11 am. When she passed away, we were all around her; lots of grandchildren were all over the bed, and the nurse said her time of passing was 11:11. My son-in-law pulled out his Bible and said, "Listen to this. John 11:11 says: Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm going to wake him up." And the Lord gave us John 11:11, at 11:11 on 11/11. We just said this is God's faithfulness.

I tell some of the stories. Now this book isn't necessarily a book about that journey. I refer to it. It is not necessarily a book about grieving, but it is a book about discovering God's faithfulness in all the seasons of life.

SHEILA: Yeah, that's what I found so encouraging about it. You give so many stories about the faithfulness of God. But I'm thinking about some of our viewers right now who have perhaps recently lost someone; 2020 was a devastating year. I wondered how that impacted you as a pastor. You say you became a caregiver. Did you have to give up some of your responsibilities in the church?

ROBERT: I did. I was the senior pastor at my church, the Donelson Fellowship, for 37 years. I loved being a senior pastor. But when Katrina got as disabled as she did, I stepped away from that role. I preach once a month now in my church, and I teach a class there. But the Lord was

still faithful through all of that. We have to make adjustments, and we have to go forward. There is a verse in the book of Joshua that says, "Follow me carefully because you have never been this way before." To me, that was a very encouraging verse.

What I discovered, Sheila is that the faithfulness of God is his absolute commitment to keep every syllable of every promise that he has ever made. I have found that in all of these years and through all of these stresses to be absolutely true. It is unchangeable and unchanging in the nature of who God is that he is faithful.

RANDY: I think a lot of times we make the very human mistake of thinking of God's faithfulness as some sort of -- I don't know, some sort of blessing, I don't use the word lightly, over our lives so that we're almost untouched by difficulty. But yet, when I look at you and hear what you're saying and know your story, you had pain. You had a heartache, and I'm talking long stretches of it. Maybe you didn't feel disappointed, but I know I would have if I had to step down from a lead pastor role that I loved so much. So how do you reconcile faithfulness with all the difficulty?

ROBERT: Well, yes, that's why faithfulness is so important. It works best in difficulties. It allows us to experience more of God in difficulties because that's when promises break through. There are little blessings all along the way that represent God's faithfulness. When my wife Katrina, probably four days before she passed away, I was lifting her into bed, and she was confused, she hadn't been thinking clearly, she was very weak, and suddenly she started saying, "My gracious Master and my God assists me to proclaim to spread through all the earth abroad the glories of thy name." And she was quoting from *Over a Thousand Tongues* by Wesley. And the memory of that has stayed with me now, and I'll never forget that moment.

This is why I love the great hymns so very much because the new music, as wonderful as it is, comes and goes. But the great hymns have encouraged generations, and we sing some of these songs all of our lives.

The Lord encourages us by his faithfulness. If we didn't have any distress in life, then we

wouldn't be nearly as sensitive to the faithfulness of God. My devotions this morning in the hotel were from James, chapter 1, "Count it all joy when you fall into various troubles because God is allowing those to shape you and to give you perseverance and maturity." At the moment, we have to stop and remind ourselves of that. And then we begin to say, oh, God is faithful to me after all.

SHEILA: I found that during 2020 I had to really ask the Lord, how do we live in this season? This is a different season. I kind of rediscovered the joy of reading the Psalms out loud every morning. But I found it interesting that when you needed a new routine at bedtime because suddenly your dear, beloved wife is no longer there, you went back to the practice of vespers.

ROBERT: Well, the evenings were the most difficult after she died, and it's still that way. I can stay very busy during the day, and I think a lot of people that have lost a loved one recognize this. But you can meet with the Lord in the evening. So I decided well, I can study. When I was a college kid, I studied at night. So I've got a desk here, maybe I'll have a study project and work on that for an hour or two. And then just sing a hymn or listen to one and read some scripture or review my scripture memory project. And then, just to say the Lord's Prayer, to have an evening routine like vespers, it brings the presence of God and his faithfulness right into the bedroom, right into your heart, right into your home. He is there because he loves us -- and because he is faithful.

SHEILA: I love that!

RANDY: So *Great is Thy Faithfulness* is a devotional. You cover a lot of things. Just reading through the chapter titles, the devotional titles: His faithful guidance, consider him faithful, how we become faithful, live in reliance on his faithfulness. There is so much depth and beauty here. We'll tell you how you can get that in a bit. Pick one of these out of here that has really meant a lot to you. I know a lot of them do, but one you can share today.

ROBERT: Yeah. Can I give you a couple?

RANDY: Please!

ROBERT: It says I think this is my favorite verse about God's faithfulness. There are nearly 100 Bible verses about God's faithfulness. I chose 52, but in Hebrews 10:23, it says: Let us hold unswervingly to the hope that we have professed, for he who promised is faithful. I can visualize that. He's got a rope hanging down, and we can hold on to it unswervingly.

But then, of course, the famous passage in Lamentations three. Jeremiah was having the hardest day of his life, and many of us can think back to the hardest day of our lives so far. But he said: And yet, this I call to mind and therefore, I have hope. It is of the Lord's mercies that we're not consumed, for they are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness! And that passage inspired the famous hymn.

RANDY: It is interesting that that is in Lamentations.

ROBERT: I know! And the funeral dirges and the sorrowful songs that Jeremiah wrote as he saw his world collapsing around him. But he said, "This I call to mind." He knew how to change his thoughts and redirect them to God's faithfulness. So we just have to be able to know how to do that.

SHEILA: I love the fact that you referenced someone who is a dear family friend of mine, Helen Roseveare?

ROBERT: Oh yes!

SHEILA: What was it about her life and things that she wrote about that impacted you and you included in this book?

ROBERT: Her story, of course, is dramatic, vivid, inspiring, horrifying, thrilling, all of that put together. But she wrote a little book called *Enough*; the whole idea is whatever we're going through, God is enough. His grace is enough. His word is enough. His faithfulness is enough.

And I just love that concept. She went through some of the Bible and looked at that word *enough*. It really is an understatement, isn't it, to say that God's faithfulness is enough for us, that it's sufficient. It is so much more than that but we're limited to human language. But what an understatement! But I would encourage everyone to study her life.

The best stories that I ever find are from missionary biographies. Not many missionary biographies are being published now. But the most wonderful stories come from missionary biographies like hers.

RANDY: I can see that. A lot of people, they're hearing this. Some of them are out there saying "amen" in their living rooms. But others are having a little bit of difficulty grasping this. They want to, but they just can't see it. You talk about holding to God's promises and knowing that he is faithful. Do you think we sometimes miss it because we don't believe his promises or don't know his promises? How do we get to that point where you're at?

ROBERT: As Christians, Randy, many people do not know how to find the promises. The habit I was mentored in from age 19 was daily Bible reading and daily Bible study every morning. So I have a wide margin Bible, a mechanical pencil, and I just pick up where I left off the day before. Right now, I'm reading through James. So I will read through that book, and if there is a verse that just speaks to me, I may stay in the same chapter for two or three days. But I'll write it all up; I'll mark it up. We come across God's promises that way.

Now, here's the thing. When we encounter a severe blow or disappointment or heartache or difficulty, we need to go right to that book, pick up reading where we left off the day before and say, Lord, I need a verse from you. I need a promise here. If we don't find it in the next two or three chapters, Sheila, we go to the Psalms. That's what I do. But God will always give you a verse.

The problems we go through are temporary. The promises God gives us as we go through the problems are permanent. And the problems will come and go, but the promises we will never forget. So I encourage people to read the Bible every day, particularly in times of stress. Read it

with a pen or a pencil and look for those promises related to what they're going through. When they find them, then hold unswervingly to the hope he has given us.

RANDY: I like that picture.

SHEILA: I do too! One of the verses you mentioned is a verse I love from First Thessalonians 5:3 where it says: May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. What's the significance of the second through?

ROBERT: I think it means absolutely thoroughly. In that same book, another phrase is used, Second Thessalonians, "more and more." So he says, "May you grow more and more." "May you love more and more." And then, at the end of the book, "May God sanctify you through and through." So it may be First Thessalonians, but I call that "The more-and-more and the through-and-through book."

This is a prayer of mine and not only for me, but I pray this for my children: Lord, sanctify me through and through from this ear to this ear, my whole brain, from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet, the part that I cannot see, the invisible me, the part that I can see. Lord, just sanctify me. In other words, help me grow to be wiser, be better, be more useful, be more cheerful, be more Christ-like, and do it more and more through and through. And so the promise is the one who made that promise to us is faithful, and he will do it!

RANDY: What are you seeing? You are still teaching at your church. Over the last couple of years, I know that's been difficult at times. What are you seeing when people hear, especially those who know your story, hear you say this? Because to me, I can feel sort of just an enthusiasm for God's faithfulness coming over me just listening to you testify. What are you seeing in person when people really start to understand this?

ROBERT: I'm amazed in my church and other churches that I travel and speak at, how many young people are rising up, zealous about the Lord. I was in Dallas last week and met a young 18-year-old whose goal is to memorize the whole Bible. These young people, there is a whole

generation coming along that is learning to trust in the faithfulness of God, and that just encourages me so much. Now those of us who are older have got to mentor and model -- mentor and model. This is one reason I tell young people everywhere, sing the new songs but don't forget the old hymns: Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide. Peace for today and bright hope for tomorrow, 10,000 blessings, promises all mine. Great is thy faithfulness.

SHEILA: Was that the hymn that came to your mind? I know I read one of the devotions where even as your darling wife was deteriorating, a hymn came to your mind that brought you encouragement.

ROBERT: It was not that one, Sheila. But I'll never forget it. I put Katrina to bed. It was a few months before she passed away. I was troubled, and I went out on the patio, and I just sat there. It was about 9:00, and the sky was clear. I thought, Lord, I don't know what to do. When I was growing up, somebody had sung a song, and it came to my mind. I looked it up. It says, "I trust in God." I would sing it for you, but I'm not a vocalist. "I trust in God wherever I may be, upon the land or on the stormy sea. For come what may, from day to day, my Heavenly Father watches over me." It's just a wonderful song.

That was the soundtrack for my life for those months. Once I was with Babbie Mason, and I said, "Babbie, do you know that song?" "Oh, yes!" And she just started singing it, and we sang it together.

[Laughter]

SHEILA: I love her! That's wonderful!

ROBERT: It's a wonderful song. I'd recommend everyone to go back and relearn that.

RANDY: The book is *Great is Thy Faithfulness*. We would love to send it to you today if you will be a part of something that Sheila and I and my parents have said, we're going to be faithful,

and that is reaching out and providing clean drinking water to people. So we're going to show you this, and then you request this book. But first, watch and see how you can be a part of the faithful work of God.

On the mission field

SHEILA: Waterborne illness is a killer that knows no boundaries. The death of a child is the tragic result of having no choice but to drink contaminated water.

Miriam lives in a shack in Central America. She had to watch her son die in her arms because the only water source she has is a contaminated river.

In South Asia, the journey these women make each day to collect water is filled with potential danger; danger not from the rough terrain but from their water source that causes sickness, and all too often the death of a child.

Pitch is a young mother from a small village in Cambodia. She knows the water she collects is filled with contaminants, but she has no other option. One of her children has already died and the other one is sick.

Thousands of miles away in drought-stricken Angola, the rural clinics cannot keep up with the number of children dying from waterborne diseases.

JAMES: I am by a water source that is so typical of water sources all over the world. The water is contaminated. We know for a fact in this area disease is killing entire families and many children. Would you be an answer to the need of so many people right here and respond by giving them clean water? Thank you so much for doing it.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: There is something about when God has rescued you and when God has impacted your life. I think it is like he washes your eyes again, and suddenly, you see things that you would have missed. That was my experience the first time I went to Angola and saw, wept with mothers who gave me the privilege; it's hard to know the words of walking with them so they could show me where they buried their children. The thing that was so clear to me was that this woman beside me, we were just born in different countries -- we're both mothers. I can't imagine what it would be like to have as your only choice to give your child water that you know has already killed one of your other children.

But until we are able to make an impact and drill a water well in their village, they have no choice. I've seen the difference. I've gone to the villages where there is nothing, and these hand-dug wells, six feet down, filthy, horrible water! And then the next day, I actually went to a village where there was *LIFE Outreach International*. It was something that you'd helped us drill, and the difference is literally death and life.

Randy, we've made a commitment this year to drill 350 additional new wells that will change the lives of so many people.

RANDY: It will! You're right; we've seen it. We've seen how simple it is to go into a village where there is death and bring life. I have to tell you, I have knelt down beside the graves that were short because they were children's graves. When you stand up from there, something inside of you says, this is wrong, but we can make it right. This doesn't have to be this way, but we have to do something. I've got to tell you, I stood right there and said I will never shy away from asking our partners who love people around the world to do something in the name of Jesus Christ to impact others. I will never hesitate to ask them to partner with us to drill water wells and deliver clean drinking water to people who might die otherwise.

It's very simple. A gift of \$144 right now will help provide clean drinking water for an average of a lifetime for 30 people. Many of you can do that right now. I just ask you to go to the phone or go online and do it right now. Some of you, a gift of \$48 is what you can do to provide clean drinking water for ten people -- ten lives impacted! Some of you can give an entire well, a gift of

\$4,800; that's the average cost of the wells. We do these 350 wells in 20 nations around the world. Some of you can make that gift or more.

Whatever you can do, I am just asking you to reach out today and make a difference by providing clean drinking water, which will save lives. So go to the phone, go online, right now. Do it! I pray you'll do it right this second and make the best gift you can. You will be giving 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: So this is what a miracle looks like! And love made this miracle possible. For those of you who gave for wells, here it is! And these are the kind of looks you should see on little ones' faces where they're having fun, and they're drinking fresh, clean water. You know what? Maybe I'll have some of this. Yep! I'll drink this water. Perfect!

But you know what? The need is great. We've been to so many villages who are literally begging for a well. So will you help us? Because this is what love is all about: Children, healthy, fun, splashing in the water! Having a wonderful time! If you helped make this possible, thank you so much! Let's do it again and again and again.

End of video**In the studio**

RANDY: I hope you are going online or going to the phone right now making the best gift you can. When we do our part, God is faithful to do his every time. Sheila, I hope they'll request that book when they give today.

SHEILA: Yes! Please, for any gift at all, say, I'd like my own copy of Robert J. Morgan's book, *Great is Thy faithfulness*: "52 reasons to trust God when hope feels lost." Thank you so much for being our guest.

ROBERT: Thank you.

SHEILA: It was awesome.

RANDY: And thank you for watching. We'll see you again next time on *LIFE Today*!