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Week nine: WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Jonathan Seidl

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison; Sheila Walsh is with me. We're going to talk about one of those things, Sheila, you know this, this is something that's hit a lot of people hard in the last couple of years. Recently, I talked to a young gentleman who has a book called *Finding Rest*. We talked online on a daily show that I do. I'm really excited because I can't have everybody that I interview on *Life Today Live* I call it, in the studio. But we were able to get Jonathan Seidl to join us today. So Jonathan, great to have you right here in the studio.

JONATHAN: Hey, thank you so much for having me. This is truly an honor.

RANDY: Here's an interesting thing people should know about you. And that is, a lot of the things that people have seen publicly, you've been the guy behind it. Now, as the founder and president of The Veritas Creative, you're doing a lot of your creative work. But we're talking like "I Am Second." You've worked with Kirk Cameron. So you've been in and around a lot of ministries and helping people behind the scenes. Now you're stepping out to address an issue that is not just a pandemic of its own but something very personal to you.

JONATHAN: Yeah. I would say it's interesting because there was some fear when I first started coming out to talk about this. And Sheila, I'm sure you can relate. I never wanted to be, because I've done so many other things and helped so many people. I never wanted to be just like "the anxiety guy." Like I'm the anxiety and OCD guy. But I will say that the Lord has brought me to a place where he's like, if that's what I have for you, you need to rest in that. And so, I kind of have gotten over that fear. I'm just like Lord, open-

handedly, whatever you want to do with this, do with it.

SHEILA: To me, what you're doing, Jon, it's like stewarding your suffering well. I think, I used to think, Lord, if you'd just take this severe depression away, I'll write a book about it; I'll tell everybody, and it will be great! But then it's like no, let me steward this well because other people are struggling.

I love the subtitle: "Survivor's guide to navigating the valleys of anxiety, faith, and life." Talk about that, whether it is depression, OCD, anxiety, and the church, sometimes we have not rested well in the same chair together.

JONATHAN: It's so true. I grew up in a faith tradition that said if you just have enough faith, if you just pray more, maybe if you just repent of something that you don't really understand you need to repent for, then all of these things are going to go away. And I think, well, maybe there are some churches that won't put it that way as overtly. But it is kind of an undertone that we have.

I talk about my friend Matt in the book, who is a pastor here locally. Once the pandemic hit, he started having debilitating anxiety to the point where he wasn't getting out of bed. As I started talking to him about it, he said, "Well, I don't know if I really want to go see someone. I think I just need to have more faith." And this is not a prosperity gospel person; none of the denominational lines that you might think that that would fall in.

I think that current is within the church. I'm excited that people like you, people within the community are talking about it, and it is starting to lose some of that stigma. But I do think the church, there are things they can do better to really support people like us.

RANDY: It sounds a little bit like our theology might be off a little bit.

JONATHAN: I tell you what. I tell people the basis of this book, and how I'm able to be here today is what I call proper theology of suffering. And I don't think we have that

proper theology of suffering. We treat God so many times like a vending machine. If I put two quarters in, I get this out. Really, some of the final words that Jesus gave us were, "In this world, you will have trouble." And so, instead of trying to fight against it, I just don't want anything bad to happen to me. We have to come to a place where we understand God is using all of those things in this fallen and broken world for our good and his glory. I talk about how we need to get to the point where we don't judge God by our circumstances, but we judge our circumstances by who we know God to be and who he has said he is. And that proper theology of suffering, that's not just for me as someone who struggles with mental health, it's for the person who lost their job, it's for the person whose spouse walked out on them. How do I handle that as a Christian?

The Lord has promised to redeem these things for our good and his glory. And if we believe that he is a good God and we can hold him at his Word, it will happen. Not always in our timeline. And still, I pray. I'm sure you do too, Sheila; I pray every day that the Lord takes us away from this. He hasn't. And so until he does, what do I do? How do I view God? What does that mean for my faith? And it's actually made it a lot richer.

SHEILA: Because I know in my own life, at those really low moments, I remember writing in my journal in the hospital, "I never knew you lived so close to the floor." You're used to worshipping God in his majesty as we should, but it's like Psalm 34 that David wrote, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted."

One of the things I found really interesting is when you're just like 12 years old, you have a reaction to something that you didn't probably understand at the time. Tell us about that.

JONATHAN: So I grew up in Wisconsin, and we lived in this old farmhouse that was set back from the road. I close my eyes, and I can still see it. We had to, as kids, my mom would stop at the end of the driveway, and we would kind of basically like draw straws for who had to get out in the cold Wisconsin winter and get the mail. I drew the short straw that day. And so I get out, I get the mail, and it's just so fascinating how these

things creep up. I look through the mail, and I don't see anything for me. I'm 12 years old, I'm not getting a lot of mail. But I had; this was in the early days of the internet. I'm sure I'd put my name out there at some point. So sometimes, I would get things.

So I bring the mail back to my mom's Dodge Caravan, and there's nothing in there and I remember just this coming over me and I said, "Well, it looks like I didn't get anything today. No one cares about me. And I don't feel like anyone here cares about me."

It's like as those words are coming out of my mouth, I'm like, wait! What is going on? And it just came out of nowhere. That's the first time I remember having this thought that I could not get out of my head: I'm not worth anything, no one cares about me. And just getting hyper-focused on it. That was the reality for my life for the next 15 or so years of just getting stuck. I do think I want to draw this distinction because I think people hear OCD, and certainly, it does manifest itself in a lot of handwashing or checking the locks, but that's not all it is. For some people, it manifests a little differently. I have what is called intrusive thought OCD. Mine manifests a lot more in the ruminations on things. I used to send an email before I was diagnosed, and I would read that email upwards of 50 times, looking for a tone that I wasn't sure if I communicated, a typo, just anything. It started really hampering my day-to-day life. So from 12 years old to when I was diagnosed, that was my life and my reality.

SHEILA: Explain the title, *Finding Rest*, because there is no rest if you can't turn your mind off. You can't grab hold of a thought. Talk about the -- obviously, I take medication. I'm not the poster child for depression but talk about the role of physical and spiritual.

JONATHAN: Yeah, so I put these chapters back-to-back in the book for a reason. This is a physical battle, and it is a spiritual battle. I think the trouble we get into sometimes, especially in the church, is trying to make it all one of those. Either it's only spiritual, or maybe in the secular world, it's only physical. What I tell people is it is both. It is not an either/or; it's a both/and.

What I say is and what I have experienced is I have to work on the physical before I can ever be in a place to work on the spiritual. So for me, that's medication. But it is not only medication; there is no magic pill. I also have to watch what I eat. I don't drink caffeine after noon. I have to exercise more, and we can all do a little bit more of that. I don't stay up late anymore. I try to get to bed at a decent time. Those physical things put me in a position where I can then root out the heart issues, the pride, the not trusting God, the wanting to control everything. But if my anxiety is at an eight, I'm never able to fully and truly work on the spiritual. But my medication brings that down to a four. So now I can be more rational.

The final analogy that has been really helpful for me is if I wear glasses. If I go to read that book, if I don't have my glasses on, it doesn't matter how many times you tell me to read that book or the great things in there, I'm never going to be able to read it. I have to put my glasses on.

RANDY: Maybe if you just had a little more faith, you could read it without your glasses. I think people relate to that.

JONATHAN: Exactly! That's what I really hope people take away and see. That the physical is a gateway to addressing the spiritual.

SHEILA: Wow! That's powerful!

RANDY: I think it is good. I think it is especially good for people who may not struggle with that to help them understand their loved ones because a lot of times, we don't. But the analogy is exactly right.

There are some spiritual issues, however, that you talk about that I think are important as well. You talk about your thoughts; the Bible tells us to take our thoughts under control, to be proactive about it. What spiritual issues maybe do people need to know if they're

not aware of them?

JONATHAN: So I briefly brushed over that earlier, so I'm glad you want to dig down on that. I would say one of the number ones for me is pride. My OCD, my anxiety tells me that I can control everything. Something happens, and I get into a tailspin because I want to be the one that controls it.

So now, if I'm doing all the physical things, it makes it possible that I can take that thought captive. Jon, you're not God. In fact, you make an awful God. We try to make gods out of ourselves, and we try to -- it's like, what is the old saying, you can worship a coffee cup at some point. We can make gods out of anything. And we tend to make a God, and I tend to make a god out of having control. So I know that I have to root that out. That's one of my underlying issues. So even then, in the book, I talk about some of the stuff that really helps me do that. There are spiritual disciplines that we can put into practice that really help us then address those spiritual issues.

SHEILA: One of the things I wanted to ask you about is, I'm thinking of some of our viewers who maybe have a spouse or a child who struggles with some kind of mental illness. What do you say, and what don't you say?

JONATHAN: I remember in the middle of the pandemic when I was kind of doing the first, getting the first manuscript back. I sent one to my wife, and we're walking because that's all you can do. I think we were at the 75th round around the block. I said, "What needs to be in there that's not in there?" She goes, "Tell them to get counseling." I said, "Well, I go to counseling." She goes, "No, no, no, no. The loved ones need to go get counseling."

It created this robust, new chapter in the book about and for loved ones. The idea is that listen, there are practical things in there about -- here's a table. They would go and say, "Here's a table. Say this, don't say this." I'm not going to make you buy the book to give you this little nugget. Don't ever just say -- don't say "just." "If you could *just* get over it

already!" "*Just* stop thinking about it." Strike that word from your vocabulary.

But what I will say then as kind of an overall is listen, you as the loved one, the spouse, the mother, the father, the brother, the sister, you deserve to be heard. I want to be heard. When you go through any sort of depression, you want to be heard. But the person loving us deserves to be heard just as much. And in fact, you talked off-camera about the funny Splenda story in there. It was my wife coming to the end of herself saying, "This isn't normal. This isn't right. We can't live like this." It was her that finally made me say, "You're right! I need to get help." And it was me listening to her.

So I think one of the most beautiful moments that have come out of this book is actually out of people who love people like me writing in and saying, "Oh my Lord! Thank you. I finally understand my husband, my spouse, my sister better." And that's been incredible.

RANDY: What did you do? OCD was a big one. Anxiety was another one. Anything else?

JONATHAN: And I have battled depression.

RANDY: And depression. How important was it for you to get help so you could name those things and know what you're dealing with?

JONATHAN: I would say the most freeing day of my life was the day that I got my diagnosis. Before that, it was like the lights were off. I had a blindfold, and I was just swinging in the dark. I got my diagnosis, the lights came on, the blindfold came off, and I knew exactly where to put my sword.

And so I think there are some people listening or watching and they say they have been afraid. They don't want to be labeled. They don't want that stigma. What I would say is listen; there is freedom in naming it. You look back in the Bible, look back to the book of Genesis. The first job that we were given, name the animals. When you name something,

you get dominion over it, and power over it. And you show the hierarchy you have in creation. So when I named my OCD and my anxiety, I didn't feel powerless; I felt powerful.

SHEILA: Yeah, I think that is a really excellent point. If we, as the church, could make any changes, what would you say if you were suddenly just given this opportunity to speak to the body of Christ? What would you say?

JONATHAN: I would say, it is two things, it is one, teach and grasp that proper theology of suffering. You don't have to give a sermon on it every year, but you can work it into your messages. The materials that we give people is to know that listen, your life when you become a Christian doesn't magically just go, everything is roses! No. But what it does allow you to do is finally make sense of it all and know there is a greater hope. So that is the first thing.

And I would say the second thing is to talk about it. We've come a long way. You've probably seen us come a lot further than I have. But the more that we talk about it, the more that stigma. I think the enemy loves to keep things hidden and in secret. The more they're in the dark, the more they fester. He loves that. But the more we talk about it and bring it into the light, the more those things are put to death. And so I think we just need to continue to talk about it and be open and free.

And in that, I really want to hear, if you're a pastor or a lay leader and you're hearing this, I would say, listen, I don't expect you to be the expert on mental health, on anxiety, on depression, on OCD. So many times, you're the preacher, you're the counselor, and you're probably the head custodian as well. Our preachers and our pastors wear so many hats. So become proficient in some of it, know and understand it, but be okay with pointing us to other people and other places and other materials that you can trust.

RANDY: There is one right here. A book by Jonathan Seidl called *Finding Rest*. Let me ask you, how are you? What does a day in life look like for you?

JONATHAN: I would say, and this is an important part, is that I don't pretend to say that I've conquered this. I think a lot of times, we'd like to use that language in the church, "I've conquered and overcome." I would say, listen, it's an ongoing battle. There are ebbs and flows. It's funny because I did right before the book released. I went through one of those. No coincidence, right? And then, right around Christmas, I started kind of hitting the low point again; the high of the book to starting to come down.

And so, but here's the beauty of it. Just like Paul talks about that thorn in his flesh, it has made me and given me a richer understanding of who Jesus is. I have really gotten to the point where like I said, I pray that he takes it away. But if he doesn't, I'm really resting in the fact that he is doing something and continuing to refine me. And that is a hope that I have. I won't trade it for anything.

RANDY: I think that actually translates very true for all of us. But I think that translates very well for our mission outreaches, frankly. Because you wonder, why can't we drill enough wells that everybody has clean water? Why do people suffer? Maybe there is this struggle where God wants to reveal himself through his church. There is an opportunity.

We'll tell you how to get Jonathan's book in a second. But I want you to look at this opportunity to be Jesus' hands and feet around the world. Look at this.

On the mission field

Announcer: Children, they are gifts of hope, of dreams. They are the future. It seems this would be a universal reality. But in places like this, all that they are, their very future wavers in uncertainty.

The very substance needed to sustain their lives is the very thing trying to take it, their water filled with bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Whereas many adults might have the immune system to fight off these attacks, young children do not. It's not an issue of

awareness. The people in this village know their water is the cause.

Open Captions

>> Unclean water is killing the people of our village.

>> The children say they are concerned about the dirty water. But they have no choice.

>> Families are dying because of this unclean water. People are disappearing. Many homes are closing.

Announcer: With no choice of clean water, no ability to change the situation, helplessness sets in and begins to drain all hope. But the reality is there is hope, for this isn't a problem without a solution. The power and simplicity of clean water lying beneath their feet changes everything. That water is out of *their* reach, but it is not out of yours. For when you join hands with ours you become the solution.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: As a mom, I cannot imagine what it would be like for my son to say to me, "I'm really worried about drinking this water." You might expect your child to worry about being bullied or not being able to pass a test. But to worry about whether the water they are drinking is going to take their life? Because they know that's a reality. In most of these villages that I've been in, every single family has lost at least one person. And it is not just the mothers or the fathers or the grandparents that survived: it's children wondering will I lose my brother? Will I lose my sister?

It's such a basic need in life -- clean, fresh water. Yet in so many of the villages where we've spent time, that's just not available. So you see, like when you watch those little

ones getting the water from that river, just slightly up the river, all the animals are there, and the water is filthy.

They're not asking for a lot; all they're asking is for the ability to give their children clean water. I talked the other day to one of our viewers. He said to me, "The reason I'm determined now to drill a well is that I can't cure cancer, but I can do something about this. That's the reality every single one of us can do something about this. And when we all do it together, Randy, this becomes doable.

RANDY: Yeah, it's interesting. We're talking about identifying the problem, naming it. Well, the name of this is unclean water, and it's shedding light on it. That's what we do by showing you these pictures, as difficult as they are to watch.

Well, what do we do about it? Well, the action is for you to join us. Whether it is your first time, whether you've been doing this for years, join us in reaching out and saving lives. Did you know that a gift of \$48 will provide clean water for ten people for a lifetime? These are the averages we know because we've been doing this for years. And this year, as we move into 2022, we have that goal of 350 wells in 20 nations. We're going to bless so many people with your support with life! \$144 will give water to 30 people for a lifetime. Think about that! We can do this. \$4800 is the average price for one well. Maybe you can split that with someone else. I don't know what God has blessed you with. But he's blessed you with the ability to join with us, and other believers around the country or around the world, to reach into desperate areas and say, you know what? In the name of Jesus Christ, we give you life. We give you Water for LIFE! It is such a beautiful thing.

Sheila, I would like to see us blow us right past that goal for the year, frankly. And I know we can do it. I know it is in the hearts of our partners. So I just pray you will go online, go to the phones right now. Make the best gift you can. Let's make this year the year of life! Do it now!

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**In the studio**

SHEILA: Thank you so much. If the lines are busy, please keep calling. Let's do this. And remember, for any gift at all, we will be glad to send you this great book, *Finding*

Rest by Jonathan Seidl.

RANDY: Jonathan, we appreciate you being here. What's the hope for people when they find rest?

JONATHAN: What I tell people is this. Rest is not a destination, and so that is an encouragement. It is not this elusive thing that is always out there. Rest in those moments between the battle. We have the armor of God that assumes we are going to be in battles. It's those moments between the battles where God really reveals himself. And I pray that's what he does through this.

RANDY: That is so good! We appreciate you joining us. Come back. We're here to help you fight those battles every day. So join us again next time on *Life Today*.