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Week nine: WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Jennie Allen #2

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison; Sheila Walsh is with me as always. We're in the middle of a great conversation. In fact, if you missed the last program with Jennie Allen, I would encourage you after you watch this to go to LifeToday.org and watch the other program because this is kind of a big deal. This is revolutionary, I think.

SHEILA: Absolutely. Jennie's new book is called *Find Your People*: "Building deep community in a lonely world." Thanks for being with us again. One of the things I found interesting was, and I was talking to Jeremy, our producer. He said the number one call we get here at *LIFE*, from people calling in for help and prayer, is loneliness. Perhaps that has got so much more.

JENNIE: I feel like I need to show the emails. I put that in the book; it is the number one question we get at If Gathering and in my email, my inbox. I can't believe it -- but it is real. If I ever post anything about friendship, the comments underneath are heartbreaking. In fact, I put a lot of the comments in the book because I found them compelling as to the way we're all feeling right now.

But I think, what we talked about in the last show, there is fundamental brokenness in our culture that has not allowed this to happen easily. So we're literally swimming upstream when it comes to building this in our lives. And it's okay, we can build it, but it is helpful to know we are starting below where any generation prior to us has started, with technology, but also, just since the industrial revolution.

Loneliness was not really a documented condition much prior to the industrial revolution.

Everybody that wasn't even an idea; you were so on top of each other. Everybody lived in these communities and villages where there was such connection. So you see, as more independence and wealth have come into our lives, the more divided and isolated we have become.

RANDY: It's almost counterintuitive with social media. It seems like we must be doing something wrong. We've got something out of place.

JENNIE: So let's just take it from this angle. If you imagine how much burden you carry every single day about people around the world. In the last show, we talked about we really only have the capacity to love and care for and know what's going on with about 150. There weren't newspapers prior to decades ago -- centuries ago. For most of the time since people have been alive, they didn't even know what's happening in the world.

We know it all -- and instantly! It's pinging our phone. So we're carrying the burdens of so many people that we don't know all over the world. I think we're so overextended in our knowledge of other people that that circle has become so big and wide that we shut down. It is called "compassion fatigue." It's been highly researched and studied. At some point, we just can't carry anymore, so we shut down.

But here's the sadness, so we don't take the casserole to the neighbor. So we don't take care of our family members that God's given us charge over and with because we literally just feel so exhausted and so anxious that we can't handle it.

SHEILA: One of the things you talk about, I remember when my husband and I went to Australia the first time, and we were out walking in Sydney, and he said, "I need to get back to the hotel now." It was the first time I'd experienced a panic attack with my husband. It was really overwhelming for him. But you talk about that in your book.

JENNIE: The first line of the whole book is actually something that I went back and wrote later. I had written the whole book and was finished. In fact, I was deep in edits, was close to finishing those. And I, in the middle of the edits, and at that point, you're a writer, you have written for so

long, and you've been isolated, I literally was writing about "my people," and they were moving on. I was sitting all day, every day, writing -- or editing for over a year. It felt like I was now not getting phone calls and all that. At the same time, as I'm finishing these edits, my sister and I get in a conflict. We don't do that very often; she is one of my dearest friends. My husband actually got frustrated with me. I don't think I put that in there; I just said somebody else got mad. And I felt like I was losing all my people.

Over the course of a week, I was having nightmares about having to talk about this book, like I am right now, and not actually having any people. So I would be out there. There was such a fraud syndrome happening. I'm going to lose all my people, and I'm going to have to sit there for a year and talk about this work and call other people to have friends, and I'm going to have lost mine. And it just grew. In fact, I had nightmares about it. Anxiety grows -- it never goes away unless we do the work of releasing it and turning it over to God.

And so I'm just wound up, and at some point, I was on my closet floor, and I couldn't breathe, and I'm on all fours. And I haven't had a panic attack, a real can't breathe, catch-my-breath panic attack in probably a decade. But it was over that. And it was just over, am I going to be alone? And I think it was interesting -- I'll give away that part of the chapter. How it resolved was what I wrote the whole book about.

So I took the phone call. I didn't even call a friend. I didn't even have the gumption to call a friend. But one of my friends called, and I answered when I was in that low place. And I said, "I need to tell you what is going on." And I told she and another friend that night everything I'd been going through and feeling. And, of course, they just wrapped me up. They said, "We've never felt closer to you."

I think that's the magic of this is it feels so hard to do. But in our suffering, it is the greatest release we can have to say what we're feeling and going through, and have that received by somebody. And then what actually begins to bring that healing is connection.

You see in the scriptures, you see that it is confession that brings healing. It says, "Confess your

sins one to another, and you will find healing." So there is this great hope that when we confess, the root word of that is actually to just tell the truth. It's not just our sin. Yes, that's a huge part of it, but it is also to say I'm struggling and I'm worried, and I need help. Saying those things, the truth about what is real and what is going on in our lives starts to change things.

RANDY: That's an interesting thing because, in the last program, we talked about building community and the importance of building community. But now you're talking about maintaining that community. I think most of us know someone who hops from friend to friend to friend and never really has those connections, maybe burns them, maybe just whatever. So how do we build a meaningful community and keep those friends?

JENNIE: So I realized in writing the book sometimes I felt like, wow! This is first-grade stuff, but nobody ever taught it to us. So I'm sitting there saying like literally, there are subtitles that say, "How to Make a Friend." That's how 101 we went because I was frustrated. I don't know that I know how to do that. Like I don't know how to --, and it is always awkward. Like, will you be my friend?

[Laughter]

RANDY: Right. As adults, right?

JENNIE: I genuinely have these conversations, and it is so awkward and weird, but I've done it. So I think it takes almost committing to people in an awkward way and saying, hey, I really count on you as that inner circle, those I depend on. People need to hear that, and we need to say that.

But then fast-forward, what about when it falls apart? I always tell my kids, you don't know if a friend is a really good friend until you have conflict. We're so afraid of conflict. So we run the second it gets hard because we can. See, in the villages, this is where I loved tying in the Bible and the study of history and villages because in villages you couldn't run. You had to stay. In fact, you couldn't -- most people never left a 20-mile radius of where they were born their whole

lives. So people had to work it out. They were going to live there with those people until they died. So there was built-in accountability and conflict resolution.

Now sometimes, let's be real, it is not like villages have all the answers. My brother-in-law said, "Villages are great until you find out until you find out everybody there is a cannibal."

[Laughter]

That's my brother-in-law, who basically lives in a little communal space. And he's like, "It's hard to do this. It is hard to live this way."

But what's real is when you stay. Now, I am not talking about abusive relationships. I am not talking about toxic friendships that are just never going to repair and be a healthy thing in your life. I'm talking about you vetted these people, and you've done life together for many years, and there is just a conflict that you can't seem to get over -- that is the enemy.

So if God created us from community and for community, right? The Trinity existed for all time; he is a communal God, then he bears into us his image, and he says, "You're made in our image," in Genesis. So there is this idea that we made you communal. It is not something you need; it is who you are. So, therefore, without it, it is like we don't have oxygen. So we've got to have it. So that's just 101 theology on community.

Then you go to the reality that if we don't have it, then everything starts to break down. You look at the mission of God on earth. You look at discipleship; what did he say to do with our short time here? Who are we to be? All of that starts to break down. So what does the enemy hate more than anything? If that's who we are, and it is the image of God born out in our lives, then he hates it. If it is healthy, the more likely the enemy will attack it. If it is a healthy, fruit-bearing community, then the enemy will attack it.

So then we have to expect conflict, and we have to expect it to be work. That's why all those verses are in the Bible. They sound really pretty. Like forgive one another and all these "one

another” verses, but the reality is, somebody terribly misunderstands you, you don't run. That's the hard part.

SHEILA: One of the parts that I found fascinating, and I loved is you talk about the different kinds of friends we need in our life. I wondered how do you go about that? How do you go, try and work out okay, you're the funny one! And you're the wise one.

JENNIE: Right! The purpose of that was just the reality that we look to one to two people to meet all our needs, and then we miss all the needs they are meeting because they're not meeting all the needs. And so I think the reality was I wanted to show was, hey, you have different people playing different roles in your life that are different ages. It might be some family members, it might be some acquaintance friends, it might be your really close friends, but if we let people be who they are, people are just so limited -- we're all so limited.

I bring certain things to friendships, but I'm horrible at thank-you notes. I'm horrible at remembering birthdays. I'm the worst at all that stuff, but one of my friends is the best at that. So I'm like can you remind me? And will you just send me a text when it's so-and-so's birthday? And they do. So I think just realizing that like the body of Christ, we all kind of play different roles in each other's lives. And then you start to appreciate the people in the roles they play rather than thinking one person can meet all those needs.

SHEILA: Yeah, that's really good.

RANDY: Honest question and this is not hypothetical; this is like legit happening to me right now because we recently moved --

JENNIE: Do some therapy.

RANDY: I alluded to this, and I'm going to go ahead and say it on the air. So if we've got to edit it out, we've got to edit it out. So here's where we're at. We moved to a little more rural area. We've got a nice neighborhood. The neighbors that we've met are all nice. We're a little spread

out, which is fabulous, but also you have to make the effort. We also recently found a church that we're about to join. The people in my neighborhood who are the nicest are the ones that ride around in a golf cart drinking beer, and they're the friendliest. But yet, I want to be plugged into a church. So when we're trying to build community, do you go with those close to you, you know, or do you go only to your Christian group and really carve it out there? Or a little of both? I'm trying to find the balance here. Because I don't want to make a bunch of bad influence friends. But they're there. They're my near ones. They're my neighbors.

JENNIE: But I bet you could handle that. I think that's where we've got to look at the world in two categories: There are people that need us, and there are people that we need. When we look at it that way, we need margin and time with both. Margin and time with both is actually fun. If you look at Jesus, he befriended both, and he really, deeply befriended both.

Zacchaeus is in the tree. He passes by him; he knows everything about Zacchaeus. He doesn't just say, I'm going to come to your house; he says I'm going to come to eat at your house. Like they go and eat. Like he imposes a meal on Zacchaeus. Like Zacchaeus had to go and figure out how to feed all these people. I think that's our Jesus. He wasn't someone who lived guarded. He lived big and full. And it involved food, and it involved connection, and he did it with all sorts of people. I think we should be more like that.

I think we're so afraid of -- I'll say this. I'm sure these people have been on your show, and I love them, and I've read that book multiple times. But we've gotten so good at boundaries that we've forgotten how to love people. And so, where are we putting up boundaries where we really don't need to? And we really need to tear them down and like bring people in.

SHEILA: One of the things I took from your book that -- I really found that there is a real irony in that sometimes some of the not being yourself, you find more common among us as believers because of the whole shame thing. You would think we would be the people who would be able to tell the whole truth about ourselves. But so often, we think we have to be God's P.R. agents and we keep this good front up. And yet, what I read from you is no, the shame is from the enemy, and we need to be able to tell the truth to one another.

JENNIE: Well, it is either true or it isn't. Like Romans 8:1: There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. It either is true or it isn't. And when we step out and risk that, we're putting our faith not in the other person, we're actually putting our faith in that scripture. We're saying, you know what? I struggle with this. I have anxiety bad enough to be on my closet floor. What should I do about that?

That is not really exciting or fun to share. It's not fun to share in a book; it is not fun to share with a friend. It is just not fun. But when I do that, I'm putting trust in even if this person does condemn me, it's not from God. And I can keep looking for someone who won't. Or I'm such a believer in saying the wrong thing. When someone does that, when someone -- in setting your expectations.

So we don't use our words. I say this all the time to my kids, "Use your words." So when we're going to drop a bomb on a friend, let's just be healthy people here and say, "Hey, I'm about to say something, here's what I need from you. I need you to listen, and I need you to not judge me. I need you just to listen. I don't want you to give me advice." Now maybe you needed advice, then you say, "I want you to give me advice. Don't just listen. I want you to tell me what to do."

But when we set the expectations in the relationship, that person is going to be like zip it. Now, will they go and gossip? We can't control it. But yeah, they might, but they also might be in it with you. I think that's the risk that's worth taking.

RANDY: All right. You are almost had me convinced.

JENNIE: Good! I like this!

RANDY: I need to hear because I hear a lot of work, and I hear the vulnerability, and I hear the potential pain.

JENNIE: What's the reward?

RANDY: What's the reward?

JENNIE: Oh my gosh! So you've got to -- we don't even know we're starved for oxygen. We don't even know how much we're craving this. We are literally built for this. And when we have it...

I remember one night, all my friends are sitting out -- my new friends. All new! Totally awkward, y'all. The whole thing is awkward. They're all out there, and one of my friends, Davie Flowers, who is a worship leader at our church said, "Hey, I'm going to come over tonight for prayer and like we're going to hang out in the backyard." I had my fire pit on, and she said, "But I want to bring my keyboard. I want to play." And so she brought her keyboard. She's playing in my backyard.

We have very close neighbors. Like I don't even know what everybody thinks of us with all that loud noise, and I didn't care. We were sitting back there, and we were singing together, and we were laughing, and we were crying, and we were sharing everything. And I'm telling you -- and we were there for hours! And I was like, this is it! It is not perfect, and it is not like they fix all the problems in the world, but they're in the problems with me. And they're crying with me. And I didn't know how much I just needed somebody to cry with me.

I had a friend text me today. She lives ten minutes away, and I'd shared something vulnerable. And she said, "I'll come hug you anytime, no questions asked just because you need that." Now, the funny thing is she is a psychiatrist.

[Laughter]

And what she didn't offer me was advice. But she said, "I will come physically hug you." So I think we all need that and crave that more than we can imagine. It's good! Y'all, it's good! It's worth it!

SHEILA: Gosh! Yeah, I said on the other show that we did that I found this book really challenging -- I read a lot. I love to read, but I found this so challenging. I felt there was this beautiful invitation from the Holy Spirit to step out of what is comfortable for me because you're right. We crave it. Honestly, I want you all to get a hold of this book because I really believe it will make a difference in your life. God made us for this, then you'll never be more yourself. So I'm going to tell you how you can get your own copy.

But first of all, Randy and I would love to ask you to help us with something. There are, as Jennie said, some beautiful villages around the world where the people know one another, but they also know how many of them have lost children because there is simply no clean water. We can be such an answer to their prayers. So I'm going to ask you to watch this and then I'll tell you how you can get your own copy of Jennie's book. Watch this.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: The countries change. The landscape changes. The faces may change. But one thing that does not change is the hopelessness people feel when they have no other choice but to give their families water to drink from unsafe sources.

OPEN CAPTIONS

JOSPEH: We've been drinking this water for five years now, and it has killed my two kids that I treasured so much. Other children are dying in our community.

ANNOUNCER: This expression of despair is too common among the precious people our mission teams visit. People who have never known what it is like to take a drink of fresh, clean water.

OPEN CAPTIONS

MURIKO: This is the water that killed my child. How can my other children have a good life with this water?

ANNOUNCER: Generation after generation has suffered from unsafe drinking water in villages just like Muriko's. Hopelessness pervades the very fabric of her village. But because of love, our mission teams are able to offer hope through prayer and a promise that we will try and do all we can to provide them with fresh water. But the only way we can do that is for those who hear their plight determine to offer them not only hope but fresh water by helping drill a water well.

TAMMY: Gosh! It would be amazing if one day, we were walking together, and I was carrying clean, clean water for you in a bucket. That would be my hope and my prayer. One day! There is hope. I promise you there is hope.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Tammy's absolutely right; there is hope. But there is hope in the midst of what is tremendous despair. My first couple of trips to Africa, going into villages where there is absolutely no clean water source, looking at these hand-dug wells, and looking at the quality of the water that these women, who some of them had walked for miles with these big plastic buckets to draw out of the well and the water was filthy, and there were flies and other animals around.

I remember a mom giving a cup of this water to her child, and it took everything in me to not knock it out of the child's hand because it was obviously so dirty. But then I realized it's all they had. It's so hard to grasp that until you're actually there, which is why we try to take you on these journeys with us, to see that so many of these villages are so remote that that's their only option.

But then, on the second day, going to a village where there is a well that said, given by viewers of LIFE Outreach International. And to see this beautiful, clean water -- it literally is the difference between death and life. And so we want to ask you to help us. We've made a commitment, Randy, this year that we want to drill 350 new wells in over 20 nations. Seems like a lot, but we can do it.

RANDY: We can. And I know we can do it because we've done it before with the help of viewers like you. We have been doing this for years. And Sheila, it's interesting. We're talking about community because I was in Angola, and we went to one well just out in the middle of nowhere where there is nothing out there. You get there, and guess what? There are people gathered around. A well serves a community.

In fact, the average water well will serve a thousand people for their entire life -- multiple villages will come around. Here's the way it breaks down, just so you know. Because some of you have been helping us, and we're going to ask you to help us again because we're not quite through giving people clean drinking water. Some of you, this might be your first time. This is a great time to jump in because what we're doing is life-giving. As the community of Christ, we're reaching out and saying, in the name of Jesus Christ, we want to show you love -- practical love.

So here's how it breaks down. The average well costs \$4800 to drill. That's just on average as we do these 350 wells around the world. That breaks down to \$144. That gift amount today would, on average, service 30 people for a lifetime. When I say service, I mean life-giving water. I mean no more dying from these waterborne diseases. A gift of \$48 would give water to ten people for life! That's what Water for LIFE is. But it only works when you join us.

I'm asking you to go to the phone right now or go online, make the best gift you can. This works. We've proven it. We're going to prove it again with your help. So please do it today.

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: This is the water, this is only water that is available to this village where we have been spending some time. And honestly, as a mom -- as a mom it totally horrified me to see little ones just scooping this water and drinking it. You can probably see, it is absolutely filthy.

But I feel here that one of our main passions at *LIFE Outreach* is that God has called us, it is in our D.N.A., to be a voice for those who have no voice. And so that's why I'm coming to you and saying to you, we can be the answer to their prayers.

So please, will you help us right now? Will you dial that number on your screen? Go online, just give the best gift you can. Give up one thing that you don't really need to give these people the one thing they really, really need, fresh clean water.

End of video

In the studio:

RANDY: I'm excited for you to join us because I know it works when we work together as a community to reach out and provide fresh, clean drinking water to people. So please go to the phone, go online, give the best gift you can and request this book right here.

SHEILA: Yep! Jennie Allen's *Find Your People*. Let me just ask you, Jennie, when people get a hold of your book and read it and put it down, what do you pray is the lasting legacy in their life?

JENNIE: You know it is so simple. I hope they just borrow an egg. I hope they view their everyday moments differently. I don't think this is a big thing that everybody needs to decide to do. I think it is simple little steps that we bring people in in the small ways.

SHEILA: That's wonderful! You're going to want to get a hold of it. So please, for any gift at all, we will be happy to send you this incredible new book by Jennie Allen.

So from Randy, I'm Sheila Walsh saying God bless you and we'll see you next time!