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Week 27: WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Alexandra Hoover

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh here with Randy Robison. One of the things I love, Randy is I get to travel a lot on weekends and visit different churches. And I visited this one church in Charlotte, North Carolina, Transformation Church, and loved it so much. Pastor Derwin Gray, a superhero for God. But I also met a beautiful young woman, and she's with us here today. She's written her very first book. It's called *Eyes Up*. So welcome Alexandra Hoover. It's so good to have you here.

ALEXANDRA: I'm so glad to be here today. Thank y'all so much for having me.

RANDY: I find this idea interesting of where you've set your eyes. Of course, we think, set your eyes up but you point out several things I think that we don't always think of. Tell us a little bit about the broad message of this.

ALEXANDRA: Yeah, so *Eyes Up* came from a place of really wrestling with the Lord. My story of faith isn't tidy or pretty. I kind of came to an intersection of my faith when I was around 19 years old, which was just a year out from the year I became a believer. I asked God these questions, God, where were you when? Why her and not me? Why God? Are you good just not to me?

So I began to wrestle with these questions that I think most of us have as an undercurrent to our faith and I surrendered them over to the Lord. He invited me in to learn to not just trust his character but to see his activity in my life, which was one of the things that were too difficult for me to reconcile. When you're in the midst of suffering and pain when trauma is so much of your story, how do you reconcile a good God with difficult things?

You hear about Jesus, our comforter, our Shepherd, our Savior but where is he in the midst of our stories; where there is just brokenness and pieces of our lives are on the floor and shattered? So I took the questions to God, and I was like listen, I want to believe that you are who you say you are. More than anything, I want to follow you but help me to trust who you are, help me to see you in my story.

And *Eyes Up* is a story where we learn to trace God's hand in our lives, and we ask those questions. We ask God to show us where he is, and in our stories; and our trials do become our testimonies. There is this theme of Ebenezer, which we can get into a little bit later, but the Lord began to show me that there is this holy exchange that happens when you follow Jesus where he begins to show up in your life and miraculous ways; divine appointments where these moments of defeat become places of victory. That's what he did for me. And this book is an invitation for all of us to learn to see God in that same way.

SHEILA: I love the transparency of your story. Sure, things are hard to talk about. I wonder if you can take us back to that day when you were just a little girl, and you and your mom come home and everything changes. What happened?

ALEXANDRA: I'm a second-generation immigrant, I'll start there. And so I didn't learn English until I was in the second grade. My mom would sit down with me and essentially taught me English via index cards. So she was working several different jobs. I would go with her to work, and she was exhausted -- exhausted from working several jobs, exhausted from being a single mom. Looking back, I know now that we were living in poverty. We were homeless living in people's basements.

But my mom offered me hope in so many ways. So I didn't understand that we were broke and poor and sort of homeless. And so, amid a lot of this transition and me learning English and my mom working several jobs, we essentially one day, as she is trying to mend things with my dad, my biological father, we come home one day. We drive up to our home and we notice that there is a car in the driveway that I've not known before --

never seen before. I asked mom, "Hey, mom, whose car is that? Who is that?"

She goes, "That's your brother and that's your brother's mom."

SHEILA: You didn't know you had a brother?

ALEXANDRA: Didn't know I had a brother. So that day I was probably around seven or eight years old, second grade, which was a huge year in my life; an Ebenezer moment for me for sure. I remember just sitting in the car and looking at my mom and just wondering, where is God in this? We weren't believers. We were Catholic growing up; I heard inklings of who Jesus was, but I just didn't have a relationship with him. And I remember on that very day just saying, God, I don't even think you're real. And if you are real, you just cannot be good. My mom was absolutely devastated.

SHEILA: So he was throwing you both out?

ALEXANDRA: Yeah. So my dad essentially, what happened was we drove up, I met my brother, and I met my brother's mom and my biological father had thrown all of our things out and said, "I don't want you guys here anymore. We're moving your brother in with his mom." I met my brother in passing. So to give you a visual picture, it was the front yard of our home, had our clothes all the over it, and there was a car, there were our clothes and my brother, he's just a year and a half older than me, my half-brother, met in passing. And I remember we both locked eyes, and at that very moment, I was like oh my gosh, my life is changing forever. This moment will change the trajectory of my life essentially.

So that was one of the most difficult times in my life to reconcile, as a little girl. It embeds so much rejection and doubt and disbelief in you.

RANDY: Interestingly, you reflect on thinking about God even at that time. I'm curious how the physical father rejection, sort of maybe interfered with the God-Father

relationship.

ALEXANDRA: A whole lot, right? A whole lot! One of the very first wounds that God invited me in to heal was my father wound. It was the wound of knowing God through the lens of my earthly father. The only way that I knew God as a Father was through my biological father, which was a father who essentially rejected the very essence of who I was as his daughter and left us out, quite literally, on the street with no concern for my well-being. So when I thought about God, all I had was my dad and the way that he didn't care for my mom and I. He didn't care for my well-being.

It is a miracle in and of itself that God has taken those broken pieces of my story, and one of the things that I invite us to read and to learn in *Eyes Up* is the way that we see God informs the way we see the world. And so what he had me do was, it didn't even matter if he showed me 87 different times he'd shown up, he needed me to trust him and to know him as Abba Father -- like the God who sees, the God who cares.

A lot of the untangling for me in my faith and my doubt was learning to know God as a Father and mending the wounds. And to this day, there are times when my flesh gets prickly, and I begin to doubt God. Even in that sense, right, we're still on this side of heaven, nothing is perfected and so I would be lying to you if I said that sometimes I still revert to some of those tendencies. But I know in the depth of the core of who I am, that God is actually who he says he is. And that has helped me heal that. Like it helped me heal not only the way that I love my earthly father now and have forgiven him but the way that I know God as my Father, like the one that I can trust and be with. That's come through a lot of wrestling and a lot of hardship.

SHEILA: Interesting thing, you talk a lot in this book about Ebenezer stones and the significance of those. I wonder if you'd touch on that. What I found interesting is some of the places you marked "Ebenezer stones," they're not the great triumphant victories, they're the hard places.

ALEXANDRA: They are! I love that you brought that up. It gets me fired up. I'm going to -- I want us to take a moment and park there for a little bit. I think in our faith what's easy is to reason God away, to explain God away. It is easy to have trite cliché answers like let go and let God and faith over fear. These things sound really good and they are helpful for a very moment but they won't take us further in our faith. Ebenezer stones -- so the history behind that and the invitation from God and the stories and overarching stories in scripture, God is obsessed with mountains and stones throughout the story of God. From the beginning to end, you see God talk about the cornerstone, our Ebenezer stone, the gravestone, the foundation where faith is Christ Jesus the rock.

And so in First Samuel, the very first time in scripture, we see God essentially rescue the Israelites, yet again, from the pit of destruction. We are the Israelites, we understand but sometimes we just don't learn. We're prone to wander.

So the Israelites wander again, and God is like, oh, my kids! I'm going to come for you, I'm going to save you again. So God shows up and he rescues his kids out of darkness, essentially war, and he tells Samuel, I'm giving you CliffsNotes version here, he says, Samuel, I need you to put up a memorial stone because my kids are going to forget. Y'all are prone to wander. I've rescued you several times. I've shown you my hand of provision. I've shown you my presence, I've been with you. I gave you manna from heaven, yet you've forgotten who I am!

So he says, listen, I need you to set something up, and here's why: Because I need them to remember that this place of defeat is now a place of victory and that the very ground that they're standing on was once a place of death and now it is a place of life.

And so the stone, the memorial stone was less about what God had done at that moment but more so about them looking back so they could remember what God had done for them in the past. So at the moment, we remember the goodness of God. We taste and see right now the challenge and our humanness is that when life and circumstances happen, when the waves of pain, we're either coming into a season of suffering or coming out of

one. And so regardless of where you are in that, it is we're prone to forget. We feel good with God when things are good but what happens when they're not? And so Ebenezers help us to have a tangible reminder of the character of God; not so much of how he's moved. It is the character of God that we trust in because the character of God is what allows for him to move the way that he does in our lives: Good, compassionate, merciful, gracious, and everlasting.

RANDY: I'm wondering what that looks like at a practical level. You don't have like stones all around your house, probably.

ALEXANDRA: I don't! It's so funny, I've been asked that.

RANDY: I like the mental picture. How does it express itself?

ALEXANDRA: So one of the things that I find that's interesting, even about God inviting me into the story and writing this out is that I don't have a lot of physical items from my past. I wouldn't take a lot with us. My mom and I moved around quite a bit. We lost a lot of like our history and there are certain things that I talk about in the book, even little notes that I would write that I don't have to hold on to anymore. So I didn't grow up with actual physical items or meaningful artifacts in my home of my life.

For me, practically, I think for most of us, what God's inviting us into is this. I think that yes, there are reminders that we can write down on sticky notes, and that's incredibly helpful. There are things we can do, spiritual rhythms that we can participate with God in that are helpful to commune with him, but more than anything, and this is one of the main things in the book is it is less about placing something physical up, it is more so about our spiritual temperature and how we learn to see God in our lives. And he does take these moments and he brings about revival in them. And they do become, in your faith, they become Ebenezer moments. The Holy Spirit will move you to see these places in your life from a new lens and it is less about physical stones and more about learning to see God as Father our cornerstone amid our stories.

So whether you're putting stones up in your home or you have sticky notes, I do sticky notes all over my house, I journal, those things are helpful to look back on. Absolutely! But not everybody is a journaler; not everybody wants to put up memorial stones wherever, explains the place. So it is less about that. It is more so about God building up in us an Ebenezer and we become Ebenezers, and we become a signpost.

SHEILA: You talk about one of the people who had such an impact on your life, which is your second-grade teacher.

ALEXANDRA: Oh! Mrs. Carpenter! Yes! I'll probably cry. So second grade, again, is one of those moments where I look back at and I had to take that year to the Lord. And it is silly because I think often in our culture, we're not told to look back a lot. We're told to kind of move on. Even in some of our healing and conversations around that, there is this, I think unhealthy view of moving on too fast and not allowing God to heal the past. So for us to heal with the Lord and be everything he's called us to be, he has to be able with us to go back and heal the wounds that the enemy will come for with everything in him.

So second grade, Mrs. Carpenter. So remember, I told you earlier, I didn't know English until second grade. So Mrs. Carpenter played a huge role in that. She essentially was one of the first people that saw something in me. She saw probably passion, conviction, I was a fiery, eight-year-old Athena who just wanted to do the things. Whatever second graders do, I'm like I'm there.

And I remember her just taking the time to cultivate in me something that I did not know I had. And my mom and I had just been kicked out of my dad's house. We were living in someone's basement, a good friend of ours, and Mrs. Carpenter knew that her role, her assignment in that season for little Alexandra was to speak words of life. And so a lot of my passion for words and writing came from Mrs. Carpenter, essentially saying, hey, I know that your words right now are kind of fumbly, and they don't make sense, but you have words and they matter. And I need you to use them. I need you to understand that

your words matter and that somewhere in your life you're going to be able to use them.

Now, I don't know if Mrs. Carpenter is a believer or not, but I believe God used her. And oh, my gosh, she was the very image of Jesus for me in second grade in the way that she held me up. And when I look back at my wiring, as I look back at the ways that she would sit with me; and she would quite literally take the pencil right next to me and she would show me how to write words in English. And whenever I would stop and I'd cry and get frustrated, she would say, "Hey, your life is not this very moment. You have a life ahead of you and we're going to pull you out of this. You're going to learn English and we're going to get you out of ESL."

And so the context for ESL, ESL is English as a second language. So there is nothing wrong with ESL, it is an incredible program. Mrs. Carpenter knew, however, that my staying in ESL for far too long would hinder my academics. She wanted to give me hope and she wanted to give me a chance at flourishing into the woman that she knew I would one day become. And she did just that.

RANDY: Did you ever have a chance to circle back with her?

ALEXANDRA: I have been calling, so maybe y'all can help. We've been trying to get a hold of her.

RANDY: You're calling all the Carpenters in that area?

ALEXANDRA: Yes! We've been trying to get a hold of Mrs. Carpenter. We called the elementary school that I went to and we're currently right now trying to find her. I've made a few phone calls, the principal has made a few phone calls, and so in Jesus' name, y'all pray for us to be able to find her.

RANDY: That's interesting. There is something I was wanting to ask you about because I love the idea of that stone, whether it is a physical or minor or not, but that marker of

wow! Look at what God did! Look at the victory!

You also talk about gravestones. I've lost someone. We've all lost people. Those are not the kind of markers of victorious.

ALEXANDRA: One of the things that I took before the Lord as I wrote *Eyes Up* is, again, I want to give the readers an honest answer right to where God is. When I say God has brought us this far and he won't stop now, I want to mean that.

And so, as I wrote chapter five, my father-in-law, God bless his soul, passed away pretty traumatically from a heart attack -- we thought he was healthy -- in an awful way. And so our family went through a really -- tumultuous is an understatement -- of really just a gut-wrenching season. He was just a pinnacle in the community of Charlotte. He was loved. He was an incredible father-in-law, an incredible father.

This particular season of my life was one of the ones I had to look back on. And I had to get to know God as my comforter in the midst of it. And so, although what we think -- grief may not feel like a marker, because when we see God amid our grief, it does become one because we get to know God amid our grief, and grief doesn't define us at that moment. What defines us is the comfort of Christ in our grief. And so the invitation for us even there is, when we allow God in any space, whether it is grief, whether it is pain or suffering or whatever, when God touches that, there is revival again. There is something that happens.

And so this chapter, we talk about God being our Shepherd; Jesus being the one who comforts us in the midst of it. And again, taking our grief and not just moving past it, but walking us in it, through it, and to the other side of it.

SHEILA: I love your subtitle, "How to trust God's heart by tracing his hand." As you can probably tell, we got like a hundredth of the wealth that is in this book. So you're going to want to get this book for yourself. We're going to tell you how you can do that.

But first, we would like you to help us because there are some people, some days we feel like we're so thirsty to know more about God. But right now some people are so thirsty to be able to have their first taste ever of clean water. And we want you to help us answer that prayer, and then we'll help you know how to get your *Eyes Up*. First, would you watch this?

On the mission field

Announcer: Desolation. Desperation. Death. These are the constant companions of countless mothers throughout the nation of Zambia. Mothers like Hilda.

Open Captions

>> My name is Hilda Ngoma. I am a widow. My husband died this past year. I had seven children, but now I have six. One child died. His name was Emanuel.

Announcer: Like so many mothers in her region, Hilda returns each day to her child's killer, contaminated water drawn from a hand-dug well.

Open Captions

>> I know other families that have suffered the loss of children. This always reminds me of my child.

Announcer: Despite the horrific knowledge that had claimed the life of her son, Hilda has no choice but to continue giving this deadly water to her remaining children.

Open Captions

>> I'm afraid that my other children will die. I have one boy who is sick now.

Announcer: Though her situation is dire, Hilda's fears do not have to be realized. There

is a solution. We can mend the broken hearts of these mothers and provide the cure for their suffering.

Open Captions

>> I would be so grateful for our village to have clean water. Everyone who drinks this dirty water gets sick. Clean water would change the lives of everyone here.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: I'll never forget that trip. I remember Hilda. And the lady you saw there with tears flowing down her cheeks, her name was Mercy. It was one of the hardest trips, watching these mothers who have buried children, absolutely helpless because you need to give their child water. And it is like, the very thing that should give your child life is the very thing that is stealing the life of your children. It is devastating to go into an area like that. And these hand-dug wells, they only go down about six feet and they're filthy, all sorts of things end up in that water. But it is the only thing they have!

And some of these moms like Hilda, they get up at like 4:00 in the morning and they walk to where there is a well because they have to get in line for the little water there is that is already contaminated. These women work so hard. She is a widow. Can you imagine? The boy she lost, his name, Emanuel, God with us? Because God is with us, it is our privilege to be able to say, "Hilda, God heard your prayers and he's sending us; we're going to be the answer."

Because I've been in the places where you've helped us drill a well that gives life to the life of the village. But the need, Randy, is greater than I think it's ever been.

RANDY: It is! And you mention they don't have a choice, you think, why would people even drink that water? They don't have a choice. That's why we're coming to you to say

let's give them a choice. It's one thing to say "choose life or choose death" when you have two things to choose. But when all you have is death, it's not a choice at all.

And Sheila, you know we have been doing this for so many years that we have people in place, we have volunteers, we have locals. We have the know-how; we know how to figure out where the water is, and where the best place to drill is. And that's why we just come to you and say, will you support us in this ongoing work we call Water for LIFE? Because it is life -- it is life in the name of Jesus Christ. I can't think of a better way to present life to people than in that way.

But here's the breakdown. Let me just give you an idea. Based on the past, the history, and what we have going on currently in 20 nations across the world, we can drill a water well for an average of \$4800. That one well will serve an average of about 1,000 people. Multiple villages for around 70-ish years. Basically, it is giving someone water for a lifetime.

So think about it, your gift today of \$48 will provide on average ten people water for their entire lifetime. Water for LIFE! There's hardly any simpler way to radically improve someone's situation than to give them clean drinking water. As you see, it will prevent the concerns of these mothers who are losing children already.

Your gift of \$144 will provide water for 30 people. If you can give an entire well of \$4800 -- I just wish you'd pray about it. So whatever it is you can do, just know that it is a matter of us coming together, giving the best gift we can, going in, in Jesus's name, and saying, "Here's your choice -- choose life! Choose the clean water!" And we do it in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Go to the phone or go online. Do it now. Give the best gift you can today.

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: Across the globe, hundreds of thousands of lives are lost each year to waterborne disease, and nearly half of those are children under the age of five. Through Mission: Water for LIFE, you can give mothers hope and children a future as we provide clean, life-giving water for thousands of children and their families before it is too late.

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 of any amount, we'll send you the *God's Daily Promise* devotional set. These four seasonal devotionals each contain a daily scripture, inspirational message, and room to journal your prayers and insights from God's Word.

With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the "Faith, Hope, and Love" coaster set. All four beautiful sandstone coasters come in an elegant natural wood holder and artistically display the words of First Corinthians 13:13.

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. And you may request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Let the Children Come."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: You know as Alexandra talked about "I want to turn that gravestone moment into a marker where God came in and changed the situation," so I pray you'll give the best gift you can. Go to the phone, go online, and let's change their lives by giving them clean drinking water.

And Sheila, I hope they'll request Alexandra's book in the process.

SHEILA: Yes, for any gift at all, please ask for *Eyes Up* by Alexandra Hoover. It is a fantastic book! And Alexandra, thank you for being our guest today. You're just lovely.

ALEXANDRA: I love y'all. Thank you for having me.

SHEILA: Awesome. So we'll see you next time on *Life Today*! God bless you!