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Week 31: WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Jody McBrayer

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison. Sheila Walsh is with me. Sheila, now you missed this but many, many years ago we had this wonderful quartet on *Life Today* right here in the studio. And many of you, you guys know them, Avalon was here. They just -- we love Avalon, and still love everybody there. And Jody McBrayer was the recognizable male voice in the quartet.

JODY: Many, many years ago.

RANDY: Many, many years ago -- and he's -- by the way, welcome back to *Life Today*. It's great to have you.

JODY: Thank you.

RANDY: But I want to show you his new book. It's called *So Far, So Good*. And then in small print, "But it was touch and go there for a while." So we're going to be real, we're going to be honest with you and we're going to talk. Jody, again, it is so good to have you back.

JODY: Thank you for having me. It's good to be here.

SHEILA: I'm trying to think of the number of times that we've been on the same platform. Avalon was with us with Women of Faith.

JODY: For a while, I think two years. Honestly, I give props to even Marilyn Meberg because when I first had the idea of writing the book, I didn't know how to start or what to do. She was kind of like well, you do this, you do this. You guys throw books out like it's nothing. For me to write just the one, it took me several years. I realize now I had a lot that I needed to go through before God wanted me to do it but she helped.

SHEILA: Honestly, Jody, reading the book, there are parts that made me laugh out loud and there are parts that broke my heart. Before we go back, I want to go to one moment where you're literally -- I mean it is the subtitle, "It was touch and go for a while" where you're literally at the bottom and you've come to a place that you think you can't go on. I don't know if you realize this but the night that I was hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital, before I went there I drove to the ocean and I parked my car and I took my shoes off and I walked into the water until I was, until it was almost up to my chest. And I did not intend to come out. And the only thing that stopped me was my father died by suicide by drowning and I thought I couldn't do that to my mom.

What on earth happened to bring you to a place where that seemed like a viable option to you?

JODY: Oh, gosh. Well, I don't even know that I was thinking clearly. I think, obviously, and we'll touch on this I'm sure but I was in a deep depression at that point. As people, I don't know if you struggle with it, I know you and I have a history of struggling with that, and it is as real as heart disease or any other physical ailment that you have. And at the time, especially growing up in the Baptist church, you didn't talk about that a whole lot. It was like if you confess to anybody that you're struggling with depression well then you lack faith. So I just kept that to myself.

There were these series of events that took place culminating with 2007, leaving Avalon, and dealing with issues in my marriage and working through that, thank God. And my wife is a very patient woman. I'm patient too, sometimes. And then my wife got sick, she

struggled with Lyme disease and was very, very sick. And then something that we do not talk about in the book, but we lost a child. And that's something that my wife and I sat and said, hey, what do you want in there and what do you not want in there?

And she said, "I just don't know that I can talk about Caroline. Please don't because so many people will come up and ask."

And I said, "I get it." So I respected her wishes, and we didn't put that in the book. But I do share it from the platform when I get the chance to talk.

All of these things, it was just things piling up on top of the depression that was already under the surface. And I think Caroline was the straw that broke the camel's back for me. And at 3:00 in the morning, we go to the beach, down the panhandle of Florida to kind of heal and to rejuvenate. And while they slept, I walked across the street and walked into the water. I remember looking up at heaven and saying, you promised you'd never put more on me than I could bear, and I'm dying down here. I think at that moment I just wanted to be with my dad who had passed away in 2000 and be with my grandparents and all the people that I loved. In my mind, I thought I had it all worked out but I didn't.

SHEILA: What happened that night? Did you just suddenly decide no, I'm not going to go through with this?

JODY: To be completely honest, I don't know. I tell people this. I spoke about this yesterday morning at a church and I said I'm going to say this and I mean this from the bottom of my heart with all the love I can muster. You might think you don't believe it, and I said I don't care. I was there. I know that I was in the water one minute and the next minute I woke up in the bed with the sun shining in the window, and beach sand on the sheets, and the sheets were wet. So I'd obviously been in the water. And I heard laughter downstairs, my wife and my daughter downstairs making breakfast. I just thought, I almost killed myself. I almost did it!

My best friend who is a pastor of a church in southern California, I called him and I said, buddy, this is just what happened. I'm pretty sure this is rock bottom. If it's not, it sure looks a lot like it and I don't know what to do. And he cried with me and put me in touch with a counselor. I ended up going that route. Thank God!

But God saved my life. He gave me a second chance. And within three months I saw God do things that can only be explained as miraculous. And I would have missed that breakthrough had I taken that last step and --

SHEILA: God took you home and tucked you in until the next morning.

JODY: Oh yeah! What a great way to say it! Can you write that down, please? That's amazing.

RANDY: Here's a question from the outside looking in, that's rock bottom. And in a lot of ways that was the beginning. Somebody that might be watching that's dealing, struggling with this, they feel like God's put too much on them, they can't bear it, how do you navigate them to that rock bottom without it being the end to set them on the path towards healing, towards some semblance of life?

JODY: It is interesting because when I went and sat with this clinical psychologist who was a believer but didn't operate as a Christian counselor. After I told him my story, he kind of ad nauseam, bless his heart, bless mine, I was paying by the hour, but anyway, I told him the entire story, and then afterward he looked at me and said what do you want? Like what do you want from me? How can I help you?

And my first response was please don't quote Jeremiah 29:11 to me again. It wasn't because I didn't or don't still believe in the sovereignty of the Word of God, I do, but I'd just heard it my whole life and I needed God to show up and do something miraculous. But that's how far gone I was at the time. He had already done something miraculous by saving my life and I wasn't even thinking about that.

So I think I'm in a place now where I want people to know that if there is breath left in them, there is purpose left in them. I don't care their age. I have a lot of people who come up to me who are in their late 80s, some of them. They're like listen, I feel like my purpose on earth is done. I'm like, no, it is not. You've just encouraged me by some of the stories you've told me, and you've encouraged me to continue. I don't care your age or your station or where you find yourself.

I was listening to a previous guest you guys had on and how much purpose she's found in her life outside of her circumstances and where God put her. Everybody has a purpose -- everybody has an opportunity to do something significant. Do not snuff your life out before God has the chance to use you wonderfully.

I just -- that's why I wrote the book. I think there is healing in knowing you are not alone. I think we can make ourselves an island if we're not careful and I did that.

RANDY: That's dangerous.

JODY: Yeah, it is. Because then you think well nobody understands me. And you don't realize that the person sitting right next to you went through the same things you did. I didn't know that until right now. So you're not alone. Somebody understands and there is purpose in your life.

SHEILA: You know you've been in ministry and music for so many years. You were with Truth and then Avalon? And then another group.

JODY: Yeah, I'm in Cana's Voice. Well, I'm in two groups right now. That's a whole other thing.

SHEILA: You're in Avalon and Cana's Voice. I just wonder how what you share from the platform changed from that moment to --

JODY: Completely different.

SHEILA: It's strange. I remember saying to somebody who told me, "Don't ever tell people where you were." And I can remember saying to them, "But my brokenness is a far greater bridge to other people than pretend wholeness ever is." Have you seen that in your own life?

JODY: Oh gosh, how in the world can you know how far you've come if you don't talk about where you were? It's the journey. I said to somebody the other day, I don't mean to quote Hannah Montana but it is the climb. Do you know what I'm saying? It is not about where you're going or about -- it's about what you experience on the journey.

For all of the difficulty in my life, and I have such a unique perspective now and it has changed in ministry and in -- I don't know, I think you can probably, we can all relate. I think we know the can dancers, we know the things we're supposed to say. We get on the platform, we know what's expected of us, we've got 30-45 minutes to put it all in there.

But I just want more than that. I want people to know. Oh my gosh, savor every moment. Realize God loves you. He truly does love you right where you are and he's not expecting you to be perfect. He'll work on the perfect. You just come to him and give him whatever you have, little, big, whatever, and let's see what he can do with that -- unbelievable things.

RANDY: You know what's kind of crazy? To think of all the great faith people in the Bible, Moses, David, Abraham, you go through the Bible doesn't scrub their stories. David committed adultery and sent her husband out to be killed in battle. Moses was cowardly at times.

JODY: A murderer.

SHEILA: Oh, there's that.

RANDY: But where do we get this idea that Christianity and Christians have to be all shiny and polished perfect? And don't talk about the depression!

JODY: I talk about that in the book too. I talk about this perception of perfection thing that so many people navigate or try to navigate within the church. I have two friends who were pastors of churches, and both of them took their own life. One just could not handle the pressures of being perfect all the time and being everything they needed to be. They were struggling with depression and didn't get the help that they needed. But the other was trying to get help; because he confided in a counselor, that confidentiality thing was betrayed and he couldn't handle the consequences of that.

So I just looked at it and think, we aren't perfect. Nobody is perfect. Your pastor is not perfect. I hate to tell you that but he's not. And I just feel like we get more of a response when we just get out there and we lay it all out. And not everything. I don't think it is a license to just air everything we've done. Because I think there is only so much truth Christians can handle.

RANDY: There is no glory in the imperfection. There is glory in God using imperfect people for his perfect will.

JODY: And there is the glory in the redemption. Absolutely. So that's really what that's all about for me, letting people know you don't have to be perfect. The perception of perfection is a lie. There is no way that I'm ever going to stand up and say, I've got it all together. Because even today, I don't. My wife and I just got on a little bicker on the way to the studio here. Nothing major but that's just life -- been married 23 years. So I'm sure you guys never argue with your spouses!

RANDY: My wife and I don't argue because we don't talk anymore.

SHEILA: I nearly killed my husband during the pandemic because he wakes up talking. It's not a good thing.

JODY: Can I just have ten minutes of my coffee, please? I think that's just the way we have to move forward. I think we'll reach more people that way. And that's the goal, right?

SHEILA: Yeah. I think -- I love how transparent you are in this book. This is a really good book. You'll want to get a hold of it. And I'm going to tell you how you can get your own copy. What was it like, Jody to write this and suddenly you hand it off to a publisher and it's like, oh! You know? Was that hard?

JODY: Yes! And like I said, my wife and I sat down on the couch. I think I was going through the third edit at that point and I'm like, okay, are you sure about this? Are we sure we should talk about this? And do I want to talk about this? And my wife, there were moments where she would take pause and she would be like, "Yes. I think you have to."

I've never had a moment of regret since. Every time I get in there, and again like I don't share all of it. I don't have time to share all of it. It is a memoir of 52 years, God help me. But I'm grateful for my story and I'm grateful for the scars. I'm grateful for -- and I do mean that. It is not lip service. I'm thankful for it. I feel like I'm a way more compassionate and loving person because of it. I think let's don't confuse the issue here.

The Bible says we wrestle not against flesh and blood but principalities and spiritual wickedness in heavenly places. This is a spiritual issue. Depression is a spiritual issue. It is a demonic issue.

Again, people are like, I don't know if I believe that. Congratulations! Just because you don't believe something doesn't mean it is not true. And I do truly believe that there is a spirit of depression that is pervasive right now in this world. The pandemic didn't do much to help that.

I was talking to somebody yesterday that said, "The pandemic did a number on me, the isolation and being alone. I just feel so alone, and I don't know how to break out of that."

My thing to them is, first of all, remember you're not alone. You are not alone. Again, we talked about being an island, but people need to realize that everybody walks through these circumstances. And don't be afraid to go and talk to somebody about it. There are gifted counselors; I've been to many and I've been to a few that were okay and I've been to a handful that is just unbelievable. I don't know that I would be here if God hadn't brought those people into my life. So find somebody to talk to that you can trust, and be willing to open up and say, I'm struggling, and I need help. Because the minute that you do that you're no longer by yourself, you're no longer fighting on your own.

SHEILA: I have to add in for me one of the greatest because during the pandemic I found myself spiraling again. But one of the things that have helped me, is I read this quote by Athanasius, a guy in the fourth century. He said, "Whereas most of scripture speaks to us, the Psalms speak for us. They give us a line that's a prayer." So what I do every single day is I go outside on our little balcony and I read three Psalms out loud. So if you are struggling, I want you to know, that there is power in the Word of God. It's not letters on a page, it is a living, love letter from God, and that has been a source of great strength to you too.

RANDY: Go ahead.

JODY: No, no, no! And I was going to say and worship too, for me. I believe there is healing in the presence of God.

RANDY: How do you define worship? More than music, yes?

JODY: I think it is anything. I think it is spending time in prayer and literally, just worshipping God; just speaking out loud. I've always -- you said you grew up Scottish

Baptist? I don't know, was it pretty conservative?

So I grew up Southern Baptist, but it was pretty conservative Southern Baptist. So there was no hand raising that went on or anything like that. And we sort of prayed like this. But for me now, I just pray out loud, as loud as I can. It is not a Pentecostal thing, it is a heart thing. He knows the groanings of your heart anyway so you might as well say them out loud. I just find that when I do speak out loud to him that his presence comes and I do believe there is healing in his presence.

RANDY: I want to add one more thing for anybody struggling with depression which is very real, you brought out the importance of the spirit and the world can ignore that, but I do think it is important to say that it is body, mind, and spirit. You need to, yes, prayer, word, Psalms, all these things, worship, counselor, talk to somebody. Possibly medication, yes?

SHEILA: Yeah.

JODY: I know God's big then why can't he give a genius the formula to help our brain so that it works better? Again, I don't think I would be here if it weren't for the help of antidepressants. And I don't mind saying that. I don't continue to take them. I took them for six months and honestly, all I can say is that it was completely dark and somebody went in and just turned the light on.

RANDY: I think people need to hear that. I wouldn't see either one of you if it weren't for the hand of a doctor correcting my vision. So we do this for diabetes or cancer whatever they need to do.

JODY: If I had heart disease, I would take a pill every day for my heart disease.

RANDY: No shame and no guilt.

JODY: No! Absolutely not! Please do it.

SHEILA: As you can tell, there is a lot! We didn't get to most of it. It's so good. So much hope -- so much hope! We want to tell you how you can get a hold of your own copy of Jody's book *So Far, So Good*.

But there are some people right now who are literally kind of probably even in the last days of their life if somebody doesn't intervene and bring some real practical help. We are all about bringing some real practical help. So please watch this and then we'll tell you how you can get your own copy of Jody's great new book. Watch this.

On the mission field

Announcer: One hundred hours. On average, that is how long the human body can survive without water. In the face of death by dehydration, water like this is the only choice for many. Recently, while in East Africa, we spoke with Fatina, a mother personally impacted by this crisis.

Open Captions

>> One year ago, my child had a problem of diarrhea. So I tried to help him. When we went to the clinic, they said it was because we drink unclean water. While we were there, my child died.

Announcer: Unclean water is a common hardship throughout the world. And when something is common it is easy to get used to. But should losing a child ever be something we get used to?

Contaminated water has already taken Fatina's son. In Cambodia, Sumnang lost his daughter to a waterborne illness.

Miriam Venegas from Central America stands by the grave of her five-month-old baby boy who died from drinking contaminated water. It came from this river, the only source Miriam has available to her. His death still haunts Miriam to this day knowing clean water could have prevented it.

For years you've helped *LIFE Outreach* provide clean water in thousands of areas across the globe. Right now mothers like Fatina also need clean water in their villages before tragedy strikes again.

Open Captions

>> I am afraid that one day my remaining children will die because of the lack of safe water.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: It's almost inconceivable to me to think that in this day and age this is still happening, that children are dying simply because they have no access to clean water. Can you imagine what it is like to actually live beside your killer?

Water should be the source of life but for so many that Randy and I have had the privilege of sharing a little bit of a journey with them and hearing their stories, the thing that's hard to understand unless you go there is that so many of these moms like Fatina get up at 4:00 morning and they will walk and walk and walk until they come to the only thing that is available, either dirty, contaminated river or a hand-dug well, those go down about six feet, and neither is a source of healthy water.

And can you imagine what it is like as a mom to give your remaining children the very thing that took the life of your son? It's unthinkable! And that's why here we're determined as long as there is breath in our bodies, we're going to do something about it. And our commitment this year, Randy, is for 350 wells that will provide water in 20

nations. And if you will just join with us, we can do this.

RANDY: We absolutely can. And we know because we have done it in the past. Many of you have supported this and we thank you for that. Sheila, these people are doing the best they can. You see them in these desperate situations. Sometimes they don't know how bad the water is until it is too late. They're doing what they can. But you and I have both seen what happens when they get the fresh clean water well. When that well goes in, we see how it transforms them.

SHEILA: I remember one day being in a village and walking with a mom to where she had buried her little one and she couldn't stand. She literally, she was just -- I held her and she was just sobbing. And the next day we drove for hours and hours to a place where we've already drilled a well and there the children were happily pumping this sparkling clean water and handing me a cup in their grubby little cup, but it was beautiful clean water.

RANDY: It is! It literally transforms a village when we go in and put a well in. Here's how it works. On average, an average well, when you look at the 350 wells, we're going to drill over 20 nations, the average well costs \$4800. If you can give a well, do it. You will transform typically, the lives of a thousand people. Fresh clean water for a thousand people for \$4800. It's that simple. Now many of you, maybe \$48 is what you can give and that will transform the lives of ten people, give them fresh clean water. \$144 today will help provide clean drinking water for 30 people for a lifetime.

I'm suggesting you go online or go to the phone right now and give the best gift you can, and let's turn it around for these people. We do it in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He said, "Whoever will give a cup of water in my name, it will not go unnoticed." Your gift today will not go unnoticed, it will go to good use. So join us as we give Water for LIFE. Go to the phone, go online, and give the best gift you can. Do it now.

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**On the mission field**

TAMMY: I'm sitting here on the edge of the water in Burundi, Africa with this little boy.

When I look at his belly, it is not because he's just had a great big meal; it's actually because he's been drinking this water. I don't even know if I would call this water. It is filthy. It is so dirty. It is filled with contamination and I know he is in the condition he is in because he's been drinking this water. If we could come in here and drill a well, where he could drink off of that water instead of this filthy, dirty water, I've seen it work before. I know that it works. I know that it turns around quickly for these children.

I know that Water for LIFE can change not just one life but so many lives around the world. Let's do something right now for Burundi, Africa. Let's do it together. Let's change this little guy's life. Let's turn it around for him. We have a chance to do that! Go online, make a phone call, and give whatever you can give -- the best gift that you can give!

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Thank you so much. If the phone lines are busy, just keep calling. And remember, for any gift at all, ask for your own copy of Jody McBrayer's book *So Far, So Good*.

RANDY: Jody, it's been great having you. I have a favor. I'd love to hear your voice again. Could you stick around and do some songs?

JODY: Sure! I can do that.

RANDY: You know what? I'd love for you to see him but we're out of time. So go online, LifeToday.org and we'll put the songs right there. It will be on our social media as well. But you can hear Jody right here in the studio. Join us again next time for *Life Today*.