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Week 32: WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Ann Voskamp #1

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh here with Randy Robison, and we're both very excited about today's guest. I will never forget the first time I heard her speak; it was different than anything I'd ever heard before. So much so that I was kind of standing in the wings and I found myself leaning in because it was a voice that doesn't come out and boom at you, but it welcomes you to draw close. And by the end of the time, when she finished speaking, I said to the Lord, "I'm on holy ground." That's how it felt.

So it is our privilege to welcome the one and only, Ann Voskamp to our show. It's so great to have you here.

ANN: So good to be here. I love you so much, Sheila!

SHEILA: Ditto! I love you so much. [Laughing] But this new book of yours, *Waymaker*, I got it early. And well, it's one of the most beautifully, vulnerable, transparent, blood, sweat, and tears books that I've ever, ever read. And you just go there from the beginning.

I wonder if you'd take Randy and I back to that day when this young girl -- so young is getting married. What do you remember of that day?

ANN: Oh, yes. I think *Waymaker* opens with the line, our honeymoon was -- we were on the third day of our honeymoon. We cut our honeymoon four days short. You think oh! I think I came to our wedding like every bride does with expectations of what life would look like, of what the fairy tale would look like. My mother always says expectations can kill relationships. And it kills our relationships with each other when we have these high

expectations. And it kills our relationship with God when we have these expectations.

I think I was 20 years old when I got married and you kind of buy the story that comes out of Hollywood and out of our music, that I think we'll live the fairy tale. Somehow, we can navigate life and avoid suffering and hardship and pain. But there will be a way through that avoids hospital rooms, a way through that avoids graves, a way through like if you punch in the right formula we'll get the right kind of life out.

I think right from my honeymoon I started to realize, oh, this is a broken world and there is no way through without having your heart broken. So how are you going to navigate in a brokenhearted world?

SHEILA: Because the interesting thing is you know you're young, full of hope, bright-eyed and one day into your four-day honeymoon your husband said, "Let's go home." He probably did it with great joy, I'll get back to work.

ANN: Back to work! But he did, not realizing -- well, I stepped into the bathroom, and as I write in *Waymaker* and turn the shower on so he can't hear me crying, what have I gotten myself into? This is a gentle, kind man who maybe was just oblivious in his own way.

RANDY: We tend to do that. [Laughing]

ANN: But *Waymaker*, in the final chapter, ends with our 25th wedding anniversary and a second honeymoon where he really -- I was concerned. Oh, can we go away and it would be okay? Will I be enough? So I lined up all these activities that we could go and do. I will keep him busy with all the things he'll want to go see. Do you want to go --? I had all these different activities that were ATVing and four-wheeling, and all the things. And he said, "I just want to be with you." And I think *Waymaker* tells a love story of our marriage and a love story of me falling in love with the little girl we brought home and adopted. But those, the love story of a marriage and the love story of adoption are a

metaphor for falling in love with God, the God who wants to be with us, the God who wants that kind of bonding and attachment with himself.

So I'm telling two stories that really, the stories we see in scripture, marriage, and adoption are used in scripture as the metaphor for the kind of intimate relationship and closeness that God calls us to himself. Which is different than a God that is angry, a God that demands from us. God comes to the cross to redeem us and bring us in. That atonement at the cross is for attachment with us. He wants that kind of intimate communion with us. Not a -- if we have a relationship with God are we constantly thinking about how close is my soul in relation to him?

So I'm telling love stories throughout *Waymaker* to draw you into the greatest love story, which is with Jesus himself.

RANDY: Did you ever fall into the trap that many of us in the church do of making all the plans of here's what we're going to do, God? Bless my plans!

ANN: All the time. And confessing it was a transactional relationship with God. I show up with this and give you this, Lord, and then you need to give me this life of not suffering, this life of no pain. As opposed to, he says, "I'm Emanuel, the God with you. The God who enters your suffering." And calls us to enter into the sufferings of the world with him. And it's an upside-down way of thinking that when we enter into the sufferings of the world, him entering ours and us entering into the worlds with him, that's the redemptive story, that's where he begins to re-story us and re-story the whole world.

I think I was -- as I wrote in the book before *Waymaker*, *The Broken Way*, I was scared of broken things, afraid of broken things. But don't be afraid of broken things; that's where God's going to do a new thing. He is about a God who makes the way to resurrect things.

SHEILA: You had already experienced profound suffering even before you walked in that white dress. I wondered when you and your husband were thinking of having

children, did what happened with your little sister impact you?

ANN: This is why I love you, Sheila Walsh. The most insightful questions no one has ever asked me but haunted me all of the time. Sometimes I think the Lord, he is the Word, he is the author of our stories. He is writing a good story.

My first book *One Thousand Gifts* opens with my -- I was four years old standing beside my mother when my 18-month-old little sister was run over and crushed and killed in front of us in the farm yard. My husband comes from a family of nine. His oldest brother was killed in a car accident when he was 17 years old on the way to youth group a mile from home. And then he had a five-year-old brother who was born with all kinds of different abilities and passed just after he was five. So we both came from families where children had died.

I think when we got married could we navigate without having to bury any babies? I think it was a constant script and narrative in our mind that we're not invincible. That the awful terrible thing that you think maybe it will just happen to someone else, it can happen to you.

So you have a way of life every day because no one calls you and says this is the day your life is going to change. You need to have the spiritual muscles already robust, and ready, the scripture also in your mind that you know the character of God, you know who he is, so you're prepared for when the bottom falls out. Because I think it is going to look different for each of us but nobody -- all roads do not lead to Rome. All roads lead through Gethsemane. We all are going to face our own Gethsemanes where we're pressed in and it's great drops of blood as we beg God for a different way. But can we in those Gethsemanes say, "Not my way but your way; not my will but your will?" And trust that that road through Gethsemane leads all into the empty tomb and resurrections beyond what we can even imagine but we can trust.

He's writing a good line into all of our stories, and it won't end until there is abundance

and resurrection at the end. So trust him in the middle. Faith gives thanks in the middle of hard stories.

RANDY: I don't know that all of us could say yes to being prepared for that. I think especially if you have that sort of transactional relationship with God, I have enough faith, I've done enough works, I think that's a real stumbling block. How important is it that we understand by living prior to getting to that moment of difficulty, the God with us? Because when God is with us I think we know that there is a resurrection, there is a way. I don't see it but I know he is with me so there has got to be a way, as opposed to the disappointments so many people feel when they hit those hard times.

ANN: Yeah, I think we all have -- I wrote about it in *Waymaker*. We all have this instead of the G.P.S. system, we have E.P.S. System -- an expectational positioning system. I do this, Lord and you should do this. I have expectations. My life should look like this.

I think we don't need to be afraid even when we go this way and take the wrong turn, he is the hound of heaven. He will still come after us. It's not that I have to get all the things right so that life turns out right. *Waymaker* tells the story about how I got things so terribly wrong. I took all kinds of wrong turns and ended up in the bottom of my own pit. And he comes after you, not to reach down and pull you out of the pit, he is the arms at the bottom of the pit holding you.

So even if our relationship with the Lord is such that it is transactional and we take all kinds of wrong turns, we can trust he's still coming after us. But I think for us for to -- I think if we stay in a position of a transactional relationship with God, we get to the point of like, it can begin to undermine our entire faith in God where we say that if you're not giving me this, then like I'm out of here.

But where does out lead to? I mean this is our Father's world. He is sovereign and on the throne. There is no way out because God is sovereign over all of it. The way out, I write about it in *Waymaker*, our way out literally wilderness is us. A lot of times our own turns,

we think God is taking me out into the wilderness. Well, sometimes our own decisions actually wilderness us that we are not trusting -- trusting that God will actually take care of us.

Well, my terms, I write in *Waymaker* all of life turns on the turn. Every moment we have a decision to make, which way am I going to turn? Turn to something that is going to quote-unquote fulfill my emptiness, numb my pain, escapism. Or am I going to turn to the one who made me, that I'm made for him. And ultimately, he is going to fulfill me. So in those moments, we can either turn towards him or as I write in *Waymaker*, I turn towards myself and try to self-comfort, self-salvation, and self-preservation which ends up leading to wildernessing ourselves.

SHEILA: One of the things I find fascinating about you, Ann is that even though you have encountered so much suffering, you remain hands open. Tell us about the little girl with the broken heart.

ANN: Oh! The little girl with the broken heart has grown up so much. I think ultimately, a posture of a Christian needs to be cruciform, that we are shaped and formed like a cross. That we live not self-protecting and self-salvation and self-preservation but do we live formed and shaped like a cross with our arms wide open to receive whatever God gives is actually a gift, even when it doesn't feel like a gift to me.

Can I live cruciform with arms wide open? Can I live with hands wide open to receive what God gives as a gift? But it's going to redeem me, sanctify me, form and shape me to be more like Jesus.

Actually, in *Broken Way*, I talk about our daughter Shalom. She had taped a heart on her chest to remind her to live wholeheartedly. And as she had pressed that on there, it had ripped and the heart had torn. I was so scared this little girl was going to burst into tears. She said, "No, no, mama. Maybe where it's broken like this is where more of my love gets out into the world." I'm like oh, that statement so impacted me. I didn't have to be

afraid of broken hearts, which leads us to the story I tell in *Waymaker* of adopting a little girl from China, who literally has half of a heart and would need multiple heart surgeries to live, and eventually, Lord willing, someday will need a heart transplant.

But I think we live in a broken world, and we don't need to be afraid of broken hearts. When we were deciding to adopt Shiloh, we had to, because Sheila, we were so concerned. I knew what it was like to experience my sister's death where the rest of our children, are our six children biological children open to bringing home a child who, the medical work is all so palliative. There is no cure for Shiloh's heart.

So sitting down with the kids and saying, are you okay with what this could mean for our family? And I think for me, part of it was redeeming the story of Amy. I came from a family where death just about destroyed us but in Christ, we didn't have to be afraid of death. So asking our children -- and Malachi at the time was 13 and he said, "She's terminal?"

And we said, "Yes."

And he said, "Well, we're all terminal, right?"

And we went, "Yes."

And he said, "And she needs to know about Jesus, right?"

We said, "Yes."

And he said, "So I don't really understand, what's the problem?"

But just a different way of thinking that we don't need to be afraid of broken hearts because of Jesus. He is the God who is with us, who enters into the suffering and walks us through the valleys. Those valleys are the valleys of his cupped hands; he's carrying us

all the way through.

SHEILA: I was wondering about your marriage in the midst of all of this. Because I think disappointment is one of the most difficult things to deal with. And you're one kind of person, Darrell's another kind of person, what have you learned that you've deposited into *Waymaker* about how love works?

ANN: Yes, bringing Shiloh home from China, and as I was bonding with her, there was a debonding, an unattachment with my husband as I was pouring everything into bonding with this little one, which did cause a lot of marriage trials. I think as I write in *Waymaker*, there are no standing lovers. It's always about laying down your agenda, laying down your plans. How do you live cruciform?

Waymaker tells the story about how I wanted to protect myself and withdraw. And I think sometimes in marriages someone says something that they don't mean in a barbing kind of way, but it nicks our heart in a certain way and you go, "Oh, wow! I'm just going to pull in here and I'm going to take care of myself." Augustine, Barth, Luther, Wright...that's really the default of humanity. That we in, Latin it is called *incurvatus in se*. We curve in on ourselves to protect ourselves.

Me trying to protect myself and not staying in a cruciform posture, a posture of vulnerability where I kept my heart wide open brought us to the point, I write about it in *Waymaker*, it just about imploded our marriage until I ended up in my own literal heart failure in the hospital with double pneumonia, my lungs filling up with fluid and every breath hurt so badly and coughing. And Lord keeping me up through the night. It was my come-to-Jesus moment where I realized I have wilderness myself by withdrawing, and just like the *Waymaker* is about, really, the children of Israel leaving Egypt, coming across the Red Sea, wanting to get to the Promised Land.

But so many times they want to take care of themselves. We'll melt all of our jewels and our earrings and make our own golden calf. We can take care of ourselves better than

God can take care of ourselves. Which is really what I had done in *Waymaker* in our marriage. I decided I could take care of myself. And in the hospital, not being able to breathe, in my own heart failure, picking up the phone and calling Darrell.

SHEILA: At 4:00 in the morning --

ANN: At 4:00 in the morning and saying, "I need you to come, and I need to tell you where that barb in my heart happened, and I need to start to live vulnerable, open-hearted, open-handed and let him in and trust that God was going knit our hearts together. Because we are made -- we are wired for attachment. We are wired for attachment with our partner, with God, with our family, and our people. And when we turn in there is no way out. The only way out is to live with hands outward, hands open; that posture of outward cruciformity leads us -- it is a posture of vulnerability, which ultimately leads us to intimacy which is the ultimate Promised Land. That's where we're all trying to get to. And when we turn in to protect ourselves, we're never going to get to that Promised Land. Which isn't a place -- it is always a relationship. It is always intimacy with God and with people.

SHEILA: As you can clearly tell you're going to want to read this book for yourself. It is profound. It is a profound gift as I said to Ann off the air, that she has stewarded her suffering so powerfully. So I'm going to tell you how you can get a hold of your own copy of *Waymaker*.

But first of all, Randy and I would love you to watch. We have such a passionate concern for mothers at the moment whose biggest worry is how can I get a cup of clean water for my child? And we want to be an answer to that prayer. Watch this.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: Like any mother, Beatrice longs to see her children happy and healthy. And in pursuing her desires for their well-being, Beatrice simply wants to provide them with the basics of life. But in Beatrice's case her hopes for her children ever having any kind of a future have been shattered because of their water source.

Open Captions

>> I felt really bad that it was the water that caused my child to get sick and die.

ANNOUNCER: This is never how Beatrice intended life to be, losing a child because her water supply is contaminated. And then knowing that she has no other choice but to give the same water to her other children.

Open Captions

>> I'm afraid my other children will die from drinking this water just like my youngest child did.

ANNOUNCER: What makes Beatrice's situation even more tragic is knowing that a clean water well could make the difference between life and death, not only for her children but for all of the children in her village.

Open Captions

>> I would say thank you to the people that would be able to give us clean water. I would jump, dance and clap my hands and be thankful for this blessing.

[Water splashing]

End of clip

In the studio

SHEILA: You know the only uncontaminated water available to so many of these moms are the tears that flow down their faces. I'll never forget my first morning in a village in

Zambia. And one of these really sweet moms asked me would I like to go with her to see where her child is buried. It was just -- I didn't know how to describe that privilege.

Her name was Merci. And as we walked, it was quite a walk. As we got closer, I literally had to hold her up because she couldn't bear the weight of her own pain. And we both knelt beside that little grave. It was as if this cry from heaven, as if God's tears were watering her child's grave.

I remember getting up and the rest of that day thinking, I will never be the same person again. Because what these moms are asking for is the most basic -- they're incredible women. They get up at 4:00 in the morning and they will walk for miles to come to this horrible, hand-dug well that is filthy -- the kind of water I wouldn't give to my dog. But it's all they have to give to their children.

Can you imagine if you're a mom and you've already buried a child but you're giving exactly what you gave to that child to the children you still have? You know we live in a land of plenty, overabundance, and I just think wouldn't it be great if we start to skip some things we don't need to give them the very thing that they cannot live without. We can do this, Randy.

RANDY: We can. You used an interesting word just now and I heard in another piece where you said it is not an obligation, it is a privilege. I thought, is it? I had that moment. And I think it is a little bit about what we've been talking about with Ann out of her book. Because I had this kind of transaction like we're supposed to do this as Christians. We must do this for God. I thought no. I think, Sheila, you're right.

\$48 will give ten people clean water for a lifetime; \$144 -- 30 people. Maybe you have the finances to give an entire well of \$4800. The beautiful thing is that you're invited to represent God, Jesus Christ, and his love through sacrificial giving to strangers, people you don't know, people that might not know God. You have this chance to represent him. How? Not in word but in deed which speaks a lot louder.

I'm asking you, do you want to represent our savior to people who are dying? You can do it today. Go online, go to the phones, and make the best gift you can. I can promise you, standing on what my parents have built all these years, I can promise you, that if you trust us to represent God to these people around the world, we will fulfill that. We will do what we say. So join us. I pray you'll do it and I pray you'll do it right 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

In the studio

SHEILA: Let's do this in Jesus' name. For any gift at all please ask for your very own copy of *Waymaker*, "Finding the way to the life you've always dreamed of." This is not let's just smile and pretend life's great. This is an honest path to the way home. I don't know even what to -- to say to you other than what a sacrificial gift you have given us in this book. We are profoundly grateful!

ANN: The *Waymaker* doesn't just make a way through, he makes the way to you. And when you know that he has come all the way to you, it is no longer transactional, it is completely transformational.

SHEILA: Okay. Think on these things. We love you so much. And we'll see you tomorrow!

RANDY: Bye!