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Week 35: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Stephen and Amanda Miller

SHEILA: Hi! Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh here with my cohort Randy Robison. We're excited. I've known this gentleman for a long, long time and I've never met him. That's the way social media goes these days. You kind of become familiar with someone. But we're very excited to welcome Stephen Miller and his beautiful wife, Amanda to the show.

AMANDA: Thank you.

SHEILA: And we're excited because you have a brand-new book; intriguing title, *The Art of Getting It Wrong*. Why did you choose that title?

STEPHEN: You know, I think there is one universal truth to every person and that is to err is human. Right? To fail is a normal part of life. So there's got to be something that you can get out of that. It is not like the end. I wanted to kind of give a little bit of hope, both for the person who is considering doing something, maybe there is a passion in their heart or a purpose that God's put in their heart, and they're just paralyzed with anxiety over the fear of failing. Or maybe I've come on the other side of this, and I tried some things and I didn't get it right. What do I do in the wake of that? So it's about, hey, I want to tell you, you're not your failure. Your failure isn't final. And your failures don't define you, but they can refine you. They can be the greatest thing that pushes you even further into your purpose and helps you to become the person God has created you to be and is creating you to be. So that's kind of --

I sort of played off the whole Bob Ross thing, if you will. You've got the little mistake, well, that's just a happy little tree now. The literal art of getting it wrong.

RANDY: There are no mistakes -- there are only -- Okay, didn't expect a Bob Ross reference in this show.

STEPHEN: I'm just coming out of the gate hot.

RANDY: But I love it actually. You are not afraid to set yourself up for potential failure. You've got a few kids.

STEPHEN: Just a couple, we've got seven. We've got 18, 16, 16, 15, 14, 8, and 6; and so it's kind of a crazy time around our house all the time.

RANDY: Yeah, and then you do that which is crazy enough but then you put it on where people can see it. So you've got *The Miller Fam*, the show.

SHEILA: YouTube channel.

RANDY: Why do you put yourselves out there so much? That would terrify me even though I do this. The whole family thing would be like oh, no, no.

AMANDA: It can be really scary. I think at first when we were even praying through that, you know you're counting the cost because it can be really scary because people can be very critical and this is your family you're talking about. But there is just a passion in our hearts to share the beauty of adoption, the beauty of diversity, and ultimately, the beauty of the gospel.

So as we were kind of sharing that story and adopting our children and bringing them home, we saw that that was resonating with a lot of people and we thought, this could be an amazing way to share all of that in ways to people you would never otherwise meet.

SHEILA: I think it is fabulous. I love it! How many of your children are adopted and where did they come from to find you?

AMANDA: So we have four adopted children, and then three biological children. Two of our kids are adopted from Ethiopia and two from China. It's been a wild journey, but we've seen the Lord kind of orchestrating our steps every step of the way. So it's been amazing.

RANDY: Yeah, not always easy.

STEPHEN: Definitely not. Most things that are worth doing aren't. I feel like that's part of the beauty of getting to do what we do online is there is such a fear of the unknown, and there is sort of this mystique and mystery about it. And people, if you don't know then you don't know. So the fact that we get to tell our story tears down some of those walls and helps people to see that they can do it as well. If that's what God is putting on their heart, you can step out in faith.

RANDY: What have been some of the bigger battles you've had to fight through?

STEPHEN: I think particularly, most recently we adopted our son Lincoln.

SHEILA: Who is adorable!

STEPHEN: He is amazing! And he's just the happiest kid in the world. Always laughing. You give him a book and a snack, and he is good to go. But we knew he had left-side hemiplegia. So we knew when he was either in utero or just born, he'd had several strokes. It is a form of cerebral palsy, strokes on the right side of his brain that affected the left side of his body.

So he has a lot of weakness on the left side; couldn't walk, wasn't supposed to be able to

walk, wasn't supposed to be able to talk, wasn't supposed to be able to do any of that. And when we brought him home, we knew that was an issue. We didn't know the extent of it. And so lots of M.R.I.'s, scans, all kinds of stuff, doctor visits later. A year in, we found out he had a rare brain disease called moyamoya, which restricts the capillaries in the vein in your brain and starves the brain of oxygen, which was what was causing the strokes to begin with; why he had cerebral palsy to begin with. So it wasn't a matter *if* he would have another stroke, but *when* he would have another stroke.

So 2018, in October, we went up to northern California. There are two kinds of prominent doctors in the nation that do this kind of surgery where they cut open the brain and there is sort of one super highway vein that goes extracranial, so outside of the skull, and they moved it onto the actual brain. And the cool thing about the brain is that your body is just a miracle. God has done amazing things in creating us the way he has. It sort of takes root and creates a whole new vascular system in the brain. So he went from very, very minimal blood flow to now he's like 97, 98% on both sides of his brain. And so tons and tons of physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy later, the kid who wasn't supposed to walk is now running.

AMANDA: Chasing his brothers around.

STEPHEN: And the kid who wasn't supposed to talk is now singing, "Jesus loves me." And he can't say the words, but he's got the melody down. He has better rhythm than anyone I think I've ever -- I'm a musician so he's got tempo and it's awesome to watch him. He is a miracle.

SHEILA: One of the things that I love about this book, *The Art of Getting It Wrong* is your willingness to be vulnerable and transparent. Because I think that is how we steward our suffering. But you talk very honestly about being bullied as a little boy. And that, as a mom of a boy, that just broke my heart. What kind of impact did that have on you?

STEPHEN: I think, Amanda and I talk about this so much. The weight of that, you don't

realize -- I mean you know you are feeling it as a kid, but you don't know the impact that it has on you. For me, it played out in an insatiable need to prove myself -- that I was good enough -- that I wasn't last picked -- that I wasn't ugly and fat and stupid and whatever. Just a real driven personality and a real -- I felt that need pretty hardcore. That can do a lot of good stuff, it can be a force for good in your life, it also can be a really difficult thing, particularly with interpersonal relationships. I think probably 90% of our fights are because I feel like I've got something to prove. You've been so gracious and so patient and so empathetic and compassionate toward that part of me that needed healing.

And really, writing the book was a very healing part of that too because it is sort of cathartic to get that out there and say these things in a way that hopefully is encouraging someone else and saying, hey, you're not what the bully said you were. I'm almost 40 years old and sometimes still will have that inner monologue telling me that's who I am. So to be able to say to somebody, that's not who you are and understand the power of words in my own life. And if that's how they have impacted me, how much have my words impacted others as well? So it causes you to measure the weight of every word a little more.

RANDY: Here's the difficult part I think for people. Let's face it, in our culture you commit a crime, you're a felon. You steal, you get busted for that, you're a thief. But you're saying that your failures don't define you and yet, people are going, I'm a divorcee, or I'm a failed husband or wife or parent. We know what we've done. Our hearts condemn us. How do we not let those failures define us but rather refine us?

STEPHEN: Yeah, I think you're hitting on something that is at the core of all of our worst fears and that is namely, we live in a society that writes our victories in the sand and the next wave that comes up it is gone, and then they take a dad-gum jackhammer and etch it into concrete whenever we mess up. And so on a horizontal level, interpersonally between me and others, sometimes the consequences of my failures are not just going to go away. It takes a lifetime to build trust and a second to lose it.

But vertically speaking, which is my greatest identity between God and me, and that's what the cross is all about, that's not what defines me. What defines me is that I am created in the image of God. I've been purchased by the blood of Jesus. I've been redeemed. I have been given a new name, a new family, a new hope, an eternal inheritance. I'm filled with the spirit and empowered, and I'm not that person. So my primary identity is not my failure. My primary identity is the Son of God. I think that is huge, particularly for the self-talk part of us. I do talk a lot about it in the book that there is a real consequence of breaking that trust. And depending upon the gravity of your failure, there may be some serious ongoing consequences. But as far as it is up to you, you have the option to choose how that makes you into the person you're becoming.

I was talking with my son yesterday. He came up and said, "Dad, is it true? What doesn't kill you makes you stronger?" I was like, I know Kelly Clarkson wrote that amazing song and I want to believe that that's true, and I think that it has the potential to be true, but it could be that what doesn't kill you makes you bitter. Or what doesn't kill you makes you angry. Or what doesn't kill you --

RANDY: It maims you for life.

STEPHEN: Exactly! So it does depend upon your perspective. It depends on how you internalize that and metabolize that failure because it can coach you on what you do next. If I say something hurtful to someone, I can either bow up and cognitive dissonance allows me to feel like I was in the right, and whatever, or I can humble myself and apologize.

But I think the other thing about that is, and what I'm hoping people will see with the book is that we all get it wrong which means if I know this is true about myself and I know this is true about you, this gives me an opportunity to hopefully have a little more grace for you as well as for myself. I'm sort of like subversively trying to cancel cancel culture with this book. Do you know what I mean?

SHEILA: Amen!

STEPHEN: Because we all mess up and maybe my mess up in the world's eyes is a little bigger than your mess up. By God, if people knew the things that I've done behind closed doors, and that is true of everyone. It is sort of our worst fear that we would be fully known. But the truth about the gospel is we are fully known, and we're fully loved, and we're fully forgiven. Not mostly forgiven, not all but just a little bit forgiven, but God is like reserving a little bit so that he can kind of bring it back up later -- all the way forgiven.

RANDY: Not even eventually forgiven. Not just yet.

STEPHEN: Just right now, man! And it is immediate. That's what is true of me. So even if everyone else thinks I'm the worst human on the planet, God likes me which is a big deal.

SHEILA: One of the things I wanted to ask you, Amanda, is it seems like everywhere I go at the moment I'm hearing about the need for foster parents, the need for children to be adopted. I wondered, I would guess, I don't know you both, I guess you're probably an extrovert?

STEPHEN: A little bit. Yeah.

SHEILA: A little bit. And I guess you're more like me, more like an introvert. I wondered, what has that journey been like for you because a lot of people are terrified at the thought that they won't get it right or they won't be good enough?

AMANDA: With adoption, that journey for us was really scary. I think it was a leap of faith for sure. It's been amazing to see. Our whole journey has been just a story of God's grace because there are so many times when you don't get it right or you feel like you don't necessarily know what the right thing is. Parenting adopted children is a little

different than parenting biological children because you're dealing with trauma and grief and loss. And so you don't have this manual of exactly how to parent in that way.

What I think is amazing is how the Lord gives you the grace for that day and does lead you in a way that you have everything you need in Christ to parent the children that God has put into your home and your life. It does feel like you're living on faith every day.

SHEILA: Which is really how we should all be living anyway.

AMANDA: Yeah! It is a reminder. It is just a daily reminder that you need the Lord's guidance every day.

RANDY: And your failures don't define you -- don't forget that part. Just a couple, the people who sit here a lot, they adopted me at birth. So I'm on the adoptee end of things. And yeah, you know, the fact that you have given up so much of your lives to raising these children, they'll see that. There is a specialness to that.

SHEILA: Was that a challenge for your children that you gave birth to? When you bring new children into the family, how did they all get along?

AMANDA: Yeah. Well, that was one of our biggest prayers is that the Lord would just have our children bond and that we would all just mesh together really well. And I think that is a big concern for people that are adopting. You want to make sure that all of your children are doing well. It was amazing to see our kids really did bond and thrive quickly, but certainly not without challenges. It is hard to navigate that. But yeah, it has been amazing.

STEPHEN: Yeah, and I think part of that was our kids were so excited, our biological kids that were at home, particularly when we adopted Judah and Liam from Ethiopia, that was their adoption. Like this is my adoption. They baked brownies, they baked cookies, and they went door to door trying to help raise money to bring them home. And so that

was their brothers from day one. Which is really cool. But then, two months in, our daughter Reece is like got her suitcase and she is like, "I'm going to Geegee's."

SHEILA: I'm out of here!

STEPHEN: I think it is just like with any family. And that goes with newborn biological babies, too. There is a certain level of like I'm used to getting so much attention and now that attention is diverted to this newborn. It is very similar in a lot of ways. When you add to your family it is beautiful, and it is a broken process, and it is just amazing and hard all at once.

RANDY: You can tell those new ones that they can say what I told my sisters, which was, "My parents chose me, but they were stuck with you."

STEPHEN: Exactly. Appreciate you guys putting it out there. And *The Art of Getting It Wrong* obviously makes you chuckle a little bit. But at the end of the day, what do you want people to just take home with them? What do they need to know when they look at your guys and listen to you guys that they can apply to their own lives?

STEPHEN: I think the biggest thing is that across the board, for me, the need to know that I'm not my failure is so big. The need to know that my failure isn't final is so big. When I look at our family, I think that's fairly evident. I posted this on social media about two months before the book came out. I get this sort of like -- I start getting anxious. You probably feel this too. You're putting yourself out there. You're like oh, please like this! I hope you like this.

SHEILA: Please don't tell me my baby's ugly!

STEPHEN: Exactly! And I just started getting anxious. And I said, hey guys, the good thing is I've written a book that I will be preaching to myself with the release of this thing because like even if it bombs, whatever that means, like that's not who I am. And

everyone commenting is like that's right! You're a dang good dad! You're an amazing husband! And Jesus loves you. So it's all these people reiterating to me, that they haven't read the book yet but what we inherently know is true for other people is true for us as well.

So if someone is watching this and they're thinking, I just messed this thing up and I have no idea what I'm going to do, there is hope. It's not over. Your failure is not final. Your failure doesn't define you. The Lord who created the universe defines you. He's given you a better name, a better hope, a better plan, a better future than you could ever imagine. And I'm just blown away that that's true for me.

SHEILA: So let's make sure the book does not bomb. And we're going to tell you how you can get your own copy of this book.

But first of all, we would love you to help us with something. We always come a little early in the year and talk about Christmas Shoes and Smiles, which you might think why are you talking about it now? That's because we have a plan in place, and we want to make sure that the help gets there when it is needed. So please watch this.

On the mission field

Announcer: All around the world children face severe problems like starvation, filthy drinking water, and sexual predation. But where heartache abounds, so do opportunities to put God's love into action.

Recently you may have helped us seize these opportunities by providing a child with a daily bowl of food, rescuing an at-risk girl from human traffickers or drilling a clean water well for a needy village.

This coming Christmas, we have an opportunity to bless many of these same children with a special gift that they will cherish and that will protect their very lives.

BETTY: This is Berta, and we want to be able to get her children some shoes. It's not just a matter of giving them something for their feet, it's very important, but the main thing is they get diseases walking around here barefoot and their little old feet just get tortured.

TAMMY: I guess you don't really think about if she's walking around without a pair of shoes how it affects her feet. If her foot gets cut and she is stepping even in contaminated water, how that could affect her feet -- infect her feet.

SHEILA: This really is a gift of life as much as anything else. So let's try these, buddy. Let's see how they go. This so reminds me of like Christmas morning in our house. They're like showing each other their shoes. They're excited! Because they look so cool. Something as simple as a pair of shoes can really change a child's life.

ANNOUNCER: Help make this Christmas one these children will never forget. Help us provide Christmas Shoes and Smiles.

SHEILA: Because of your gift, we're able to put shoes on her feet. Now she'll be able to run around and be safe!

[Laughter]

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Three dollars and 60 cents -- that's what it costs to make a pair of these shoes. And I'll never forget my very first trip to Africa looking at the children who were running around in the village who had no shoes on. I was kind of horrified because there was -- it is not like running around in nice grass, very rough, all sorts of things they can hurt themselves on. Once their feet get hurt, they get infected from the water that is filthy because they will jump in the water where the same animals are feeding, and it is just horrible.

And I'll never forget the next day, I got the privilege of putting my very first pair of shoes on a little one's feet and to see the joy. I just think, wouldn't it be great if this Christmas we made it about giving because of how much we have been given? Jesus is the best friend I've ever had in my life. He's changed my life completely. I couldn't live without him. Now because of that, out of that joy and hope, we want to bring that kind of hope to children this Christmas time -- 150,000 pairs of shoes -- that's what we want to send out.

RANDY: I never thought that shoes would bring a level of dignity -- I just hadn't thought. I don't know. Last time I went shopping -- I hate shopping, you know this, right?

SHEILA: Yes!

RANDY: I had to buy some shoes and they were expensive.

SHEILA: Oh, yeah!

RANDY: Can you buy a pair of shoes for \$36 nowadays?

SHEILA: Or \$3.60?

RANDY: That's what I'm saying, you get ten pairs of shoes for \$36. Now not just buying them but spreading them around the world. It's the way we've been able to do this. It's been like two and a half million pairs of shoes over the years! And then you get into the surgeries to repair the cleft palate and the cleft lip. And you have the smiles, we've done over 2500 of those over the years.

This is just such a beautiful thing, Sheila. I want this year to succeed. I want to exceed our goal of 150,000 pairs of shoes this year. Let's do it! We need your help. We have to do it together; \$180 will send out 50 pairs of shoes this Christmas. \$180, 50 pairs of shoes -- that blows my mind because you just can't do that here in the states. Or if you

want to provide a surgery, an average of \$500 will provide that surgery which will radically alter a child's life.

Let's do it. Let's make this Christmas really, really special and joyful! And let's do it in the name of Jesus Christ, the one we're celebrating. We do something now, do whatever you can, just be a part. That's all I ask -- be a part. Go online, go to the phone, and make the best gift you can right now. Let's get ready. Christmas is not that far away, and you can make it very special this year through Christmas Shoes and Smiles. Do it now.

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: Poverty is a killer and because of it, children needlessly suffer, not only from a lack of food and clean water but also from a lack of things we often take for granted like a simple pair of shoes. Far too many children living in extreme poverty have never owned a new pair of shoes. And while that may seem minor in light of all their needs, walking with bare feet puts them at risk of life-threatening infections and diseases that could lead to crippling consequences -- and even death.

By responding today, you will help secure and make ready 150,000 pairs of Christmas shoes to be shipped and delivered to children around the world just in time for the holidays. Your gift of \$36 will help provide ten pairs of shoes. A gift of \$72 will help provide 20 pairs. And a gift of \$180 will help provide 50 pairs of Christmas shoes for children in need.

As a thank you for your gift of support, be sure to request this beautiful crafted red crystal shoe ornament, a treasure to display each Christmas. With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request this keepsake boxed set featuring four of *LIFE's* crystal Christmas shoe ornaments.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more, to help provide over 275 pairs of shoes,

or two children with corrective cleft lip or palate surgeries. And you may request a beautiful bronze sculpture, "Let the Children Come!" Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: I hope you will be a part of this Christmas season and do it right now. Do it today! Go online, go to the phones, and make the best gift you can. And when you do, you can request something today with any gift and we will send it to you.

SHEILA: Yeah, you can request Stephen's book, *The Art of Getting It Wrong*. Great subtitle: "Finding good in the misadventures of life." Thank you both so much for being with us. It was just lovely to have you.

STEPHEN: Thank you so much for having us on.

SHEILA: Let's sell the book, people! We'll see you next time on *Life Today*!