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**Week 37: Christmas Shoes and Smiles**

**Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh**

**Lisa Appelo**

**RANDY:** Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison. Sheila Walsh is with me. And Sheila, I got to talk to someone a few months ago on the Zoom *Life Today Live* that I do, and she just really, really blessed me. And I thought, gosh, I'd love our broadcast audience to hear that as well.

So we're excited to have Lisa Appelo with us. This is her book; it is called *Life Can Be Good Again*. And that has a depth of meaning that you're going to understand, and it will encourage you. So I'm excited!

**SHEILA:** Welcome, Lisa! I'm so glad you're with us. Before we kind of dive into some of the questions that I'm longing to ask you, would you mind for our audience just setting them up on what happened on that one day that changed your life?

**LISA:** Hard things and tragedy often come, they always come really when we don't expect it, right? They come unannounced and that's what happened for us. It was a Friday morning, it was still dark out. I woke up to my husband's funny breathing. Now my husband and I had been married for some time. He was my high school sweetheart. He was my first date and my only date. And we had seven kids at the time; they were four years old through 19 years old. We had a full house and a full life.

But on this morning, I woke up, really not even enough to open my eyes, but just instinctively reached my hand over and nudged him and said, "It is just a nightmare, hon." I fully expected that he would roll over, that we would wake up in a couple of hours to his alarm. But as I woke up more to his continued breathing, he didn't roll over. I

jumped out of bed, turned on the overhead light and I could see immediately this was a whole different nightmare.

He was unresponsive to me when I cried out to him. And so I went into crisis mode. I called 911. She began walking me through C.P.R. I didn't even get through the first two rounds when the paramedics were there. So I thought okay, good. He is in good hands. He is going to be so mad when he wakes up and realizes that he's not going to go to work today.

They took him by ambulance to the hospital and I was just about to follow but I wanted to go up and talk to my kids. They knew all this was going on. They had woken up. So I went upstairs. I will never forget walking into the boys' room, and it was still dark. They were all huddled together on the floor crying. I wanted to say, the mom in me wanted to say he's going to be okay. As those words formed on my tongue, I realized I can't promise them that. So I said the only thing I could which is, "I will be back." We prayed and I went to the hospital.

It was not long after I got there that an E.R. Doctor sent me back to that room that you don't want to go into and said they had worked on Dan for over two hours, and they had never been able to revive him.

So for us, it was sudden. There were no signs, no symptoms, no indication that something was going on.

**RANDY:** That's the thing that struck me in our previous conversation is that you guys love Jesus, you're raising a family, you had your priorities straight. This is one of those cases where you just go, God, why them? Did you have some of that why me, God? Not self-pity but this doesn't feel right.

**LISA:** I never asked why. I asked what now? Not that I didn't wrestle with our situation, that God had allowed this because the whole time the paramedics were in there working

on him, the whole time I was waiting in the hospital waiting room, even after they pronounced him dead, I prayed that God would have mercy on us, that God would heal him, that God would bring him through this. And that prayer wasn't answered.

But I think for me, it was realizing that we don't get a pass on suffering. Just because we're a believer, just because we've stepped out in some kind of big faith to follow God on something, just because -- we were not doing everything right. We were following the Lord as we knew, but we didn't -- it wasn't that we had reached a place where we didn't deserve suffering -- everybody suffers -- all of us will suffer. And the difference for me was that Christ was going to hold us through this; he was going anchor us in this. It just gave me an awareness of the pervasiveness of suffering and a compassion for everybody who suffers.

**SHEILA:** Let me ask you, though, Lisa because my husband and I have walked with a friend whose husband was sick for a long time. So there was a -- we knew that probably unless God intervenes that he was going to die, and it was over a period of ten years. Your experience was very different. When it is something immediate like that that there's no preparing.

If somebody is in that situation, what are the first steps? What do you say to somebody who has just been hit with something that they did not see coming?

**LISA:** The first steps for the person who's walking it, are to just lean into the Lord. That might sound very contrived but that is really when we're in a place where life has just fallen apart, and the things that we thought would always be there aren't there anymore; and the way we thought life would always be, our plan for life, is no more. We really are in a situation where we're 100 percent dependent on God. And for the first time in my life, I had gone through hard things, I had seen God faithful but for the first time in my life, I was 100 percent dependent on God, for my parenting, now learning to single parent these seven kids all over again. For our finances, I was in a single-income home and that income was gone. Just even to fix eight broken hearts, to walk us through that.

So I think for the person whose life is falling apart and there are a lot of ways that can happen to lean on God. For me, what I did was, began a practice where every day okay, get up, and get my kids started for the day. And then I'd get in my minivan, I'd say some people have a prayer closet, I have a minivan, and I'd go around the corner to a little park, and just in that minivan in the quiet there where nobody could interrupt, I could cry out to the Lord. I could cry out my questions, my fears, my needs, my overwhelm, and then I'd open up the Bible. And I was reading through the Bible for a year so I can go look for verses that would tell me what I wanted to hear. I really would just open up to whatever that day's passage was and it just stunned me that day after day after day God would meet me on the words of that page and in that passage, and he would remind me who he is and what his promises are for us. And it would give me enough hope to go back in that day and parent my kids. It wasn't enough for the week, I'd have to go back the next day and do it again.

**RANDY:** How long did that go on?

**LISA:** I still do it. I still do it. Yeah. Honestly, for over, probably for over a year I would open my journal and I would write all caps, bold, "THIS IS TOO HARD. I cannot do this."

A few months into it I thought, Lord, I know there is going to come a day where grief softens and I get used to this pace of single parenting and it doesn't feel so hard. Do not ever let me start a day without thinking this is too hard. I cannot do this without you.

**SHEILA:** When I was reading your book, one of the things that is clear is that people grieve differently. How did you help your children navigate this? Because I'm sure they grieved in different ways.

**LISA:** They did. I was so grief naive. I did not know a lot about grief, but I did know that. Actually, in one of the first conversations we had, just the eight of us, after the house

had quieted and everybody had gone home after the service, I said to them, "We're going to need a lot of grace with each other." And that kind of became my mantra. I didn't know as a mom whether they were acting out like a normal six-year-old or if they were acting out in grief. Or if this teen behavior was grief-driven or if it was being a teenager. And there is no answer. I talk to women all the time grappling with that same issue and there is no hard and fast rule. It is leaning on the Lord and letting him give you his wisdom for that child in this circumstance.

But yes, my four-year-old was very vocal and she would tell strangers or her Sunday School teacher, "My daddy died!" It was every day for months and months. We had the same conversation where she would, in the middle of the car ride, she would say, "I miss my daddy!"

I would say, "I know, baby." And I had to have that same conversation. She tried to wrap her four-year-old mind around the permanency of death.

My teen boys wanted to go back to life as normal. Not that it was, but when they went to the sports field or when they went to youth group, they didn't want to be singled out as that kid whose dad -- and so creating a safe place in the home where we kept the conversation going. And we read books, we told stories, just keeping that conversation open so that when they were ready to talk, they could talk.

**RANDY:** There is another thing I found very interesting that you talk about in your book, I mean, you lost your husband suddenly. You're at home at the time full-time with seven kids so that put you in a tough spot in many ways. You say that we need to learn, people especially in those positions need to learn to allow some awkwardness. Explain what that means.

**LISA:** When -- just like you were describing, you walked with this friend who was, her husband was going through this long illness. That creates a lot of awkwardness because people on the outside want to step in and help. We want to bring the casserole. We want

to know what can we do. We see you're overwhelmed. We see this is too much and we want to love on you. But there is a little awkwardness about am I doing the right thing. Is this really what they need?

A really good friend of mine, in fact, I was kind of taking notes as people did this for us because I was learning from those who were loving on us that way. A really good friend of mine said that with her own children she will pray that God will show her the need for the family and then she looks for that need. I think that second part is what we miss sometimes. We say, Lord, show me what to do to help. But then to look. And that friend, I can tell you, she showed up in very specific ways for us.

My boys were on a basketball team, I didn't even realize this, but she came to cheer them on at the game and they were the only ones without the team shoes, and they hadn't come and told me that they had an option to buy the team shoes. She noticed it. They're all sitting on the bench and there are my boys without the orange shoes. And she went and asked the coach what size they wore and ordered them and had them delivered.

**SHEILA:** I love that!

**LISA:** So just to show up. And I think for the person who is receiving the help, you know we pray for help but then we don't really want to let people in to see how vulnerable we are, and that we don't have it all together. There were times that I did that, but I think learning to let people in because that's how the body of Christ is the body of Christ and how we make those intimate relationships with one another.

**SHEILA:** One of the things I learned, and it was when our son was small, he was probably only four or five when his grandfather, my husband's dad was living with us. I watched the way that he -- initially did what I expected: which was to cry a lot. But then, one day I noticed him push our big cat off the sofa which wasn't typical of him. So I took him for a walk, and I asked him, "Are you angry?"

He said, "Yes, I'm angry. You told me that God answers prayers and when we followed the ambulance I prayed, God, don't take my papa. And he died. So I don't like God anymore. And I don't want to talk to him."

How does God feel about our very raw emotions?

**LISA:** That's a great question. I think there was a day where I thought that I had to show up to God; not that I had to be all put together but that I couldn't let him see what was really in my heart. You know when life falls apart, we can just show up to God with our raw heart emotions, and our hard questions. God who made us fearfully and wonderfully, also made our emotions. So he welcomes them. He doesn't say go fix everything. Or show up, fake that everything's fine. Bring those emotions to me.

The Bible calls it "lament." Where we can -- we see this all over the Bible, but especially in the Psalms, where we can take our heart emotion, which is too much for us to bear. We weren't meant to bear the weight of these emotions by ourselves, but we can bring them to God. And that is everything from anger, despair, sadness, loneliness, missing all of those things and our hard questions and say, God, I am hurting. Are you there? And he always welcomes us.

And then, the next part is super important -- to trust him. He may not answer our why questions. He may not answer my what next question.

**RANDY:** We may not like the answer.

**LISA:** If he were to tell us, would we even receive it well?

**RANDY:** Or understand it.

**LISA:** Or understand it.

**SHEILA:** I think it's hard to trust when you're not honest. Because I told my son that day, listen, babe, I actually bought him a punching bag and boxing gloves. I said, "When you're angry, you hit that thing until you're exhausted. But then I want you to know you can fall into the arms of a God who loves you all the days -- the bad days and the good days." I think it is only when we feel we can show up that then we're able to take that step of trusting God because you get that he gets you.

Have you seen your children -- how have they navigated as time has gone on? And I also wanted to know, how has this huge loss impacted your faith.

**LISA:** I think I still have a couple of kids in the home. My older ones have married now and have families of their own and it is very sweet to see the prayers that I prayed, Lord, how in the world are you going to get these boys grown to men? How in the world are they going to navigate through this and be healthy? To see them in their own families is such an answer to prayer; to know that God does faithfully walk us through. It is not a quick -- grief cannot be rushed. We can't escape it, we can't bypass it, it is an everyday, these practices of going to God and bringing our emotions or trusting him. But to see that over time he will walk us through that valley.

And how has it grown my faith? I would have said before Dan died, I was a woman of faith. But there were idols that I had nurtured that I did not realize were there. And when life empties like that, when things -- we always thought would always be there, those idols are revealed. Loss, as hard as it is, is a chance to see God in ways that we never would on sunny days.

**RANDY:** Do you feel like you had to go to plan B for your life?

**LISA:** I felt that for a long time. I thought for a long time, this is not what I ordered, but I will just make the best of this, of the leftovers of the life that I wanted. One day I was in the car, I was talking to the Lord in my minivan again, and I just kind of said, I didn't say it audibly, but in my thoughts, it bubbled up, I don't like my life. I was probably in the



second year of grief, still grappling with a lot of this, the massive change. And on the heels of that came these thoughts, that while I didn't expect this that God had allowed it and as such, it was an intentional and purposeful chapter two. God doesn't give us plan B. He doesn't give us the leftovers, he doesn't sideline us while we watch everybody else live their best life. This was God's intentional chapter for us. And while it was not what I expected, by definition, because God allowed it, it is filled with as much abundance and hope and joy as all the days before. It is huge!

And it didn't immediately change me. Like I didn't leave that minivan saying, okay! I'm all better now. I still had hard days, I still had missing moments. But it aligned my heart and my thoughts, I think, to the truth until my heart and my emotions could catch up.

**RANDY:** I think that might explain the title of your book.

**LISA:** *Life Can Be Good Again*. And that's what I wanted to know. I thought I will never smile again. I will never feel that real joy bubbling up from a moment that's just been given that you just want to savor and capture. And to know that if we do the hard work of grief now that *Life Can Be Good Again*.

**RANDY:** I love that. I love that and I believe it is the heart of God and it's the heart of our ministry. In fact, right now there is a place where life is rough, and you can put a little goodness into the lives of children. Sheila, that's what we're inviting people to do right now. As we get a little early out there for Christmas, but do you want to be a part of this? Take a look at this and you'll see how you can tell someone else life can be good!

### **On the mission field:**

**Announcer:** This season *LIFE Outreach* wants to continue spreading joy and smiles around the world. We do this in very special ways. We provide shoes for children's feet, and corrective surgery for those who suffer from a cleft palate or a cleft lip condition. Not

only is receiving shoes fun for the children but it is a blessing for the mission team.

**SHEILA:** It's kind of an amazing year. You've helped us change the lives of children all around the world. At Christmas time, I know that you think of your kids, and you want to do something really special for them. Well, I also know that you want to do something really special for children like these. And to be able to give each one of them their own pair of shoes is amazing. Not just because it will save them from cutting their feet when they run, but so many diseases in these countries come through injuries to the foot, like hookworm comes through the foot.

**Announcer:** As for cleft palate surgeries, did you ever think that a trip to a hospital would bring a smile to the face of a little child? Well, it can once they've had corrective surgery for cleft lip or a cleft palate.

Our mission teams travel to remote locations in various countries to bring children like little Dui to modern clinics like these. Here they receive the best of care, all because the friends of LIFE, moved by compassion make it possible. As this Christmas season approaches, we want to continue to bless children around the world by providing them with a new pair of shoes and corrective surgeries that give them a chance for healthy and fulfilling lives.

[Cheering]

**End of video**

**In the studio**

**SHEILA:** Isn't it amazing that we get the privilege of doing this? I know it seems a wee bit early to be talking about Christmas but that's why we do it at this particular time of the year so we can make sure that all of these little shoes make their way to where they're needed by Christmas time. We made a commitment this year, as we do every year, to provide 150,000 pairs of shoes for children around the world.

I didn't understand this mission initially. I thought this is great to give them shoes. I didn't realize it literally could change or save their lives. So many of these little ones run around with nothing to protect their feet. They're running through all sorts of terrible conditions and that's where they get these diseases. And something as simple as this, which believe it or not, we are able to have manufactured for \$3.60. It makes a world of difference.

As you saw that darling little one at the end, the difference that the cleft palate, and cleft lip surgery makes. So many of these countries, children who are born that way are seen as cursed by God. They're excluded from everything, that child should be welcomed into. You and I, this Christmas, can make all the difference in the world and it's very doable, Randy.

**RANDY:** It is! And I hate shopping. You know this about me.

**SHEILA:** I do know this about you.

**RANDY:** I don't spend money on a lot of things. Partly, because I look at the prices and I go, how much for that? You've got to be kidding me! I wouldn't -- and shoes are one of those things. But did you know that we can put shoes on 50 children for \$180? That will make a huge difference for so many children. Maybe you want to provide shoes for ten children, that's \$36. With your gift of \$1,000, you can provide shoes for 275 children -- or surgeries for two children in need.

Here's the important thing, you can make a difference in the life of a child and they're not just shoes, they're protection in some pretty harsh circumstances. In fact, protection oftentimes against things like hookworm, things that debilitate, and things that make a child ill.

So this is a great opportunity to make Christmas special for some children. We invite you to go to the phone or go online. Right now, make the best gift you can. Sheila and I can

tell you from firsthand experience, one, that this is a ministry where we do what we say we're going to do. If you support this outreach, we'll get it to the children -- and we know it makes such a difference in their lives. The smiles, it's so beautiful!

**SHEILA:** When the angels made that declaration, good news to all people. Let's make sure this Christmas isn't just about us, let's bring that good news to all people. Please go. Dial that number on your screen. Go online, give the very best gift you can. Thank you!

### **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**

### **On the mission field**

**ISAK:** We're having such a happy day here today because we're getting to hand out shoes to these children here -- and just celebrate life! This young girl, I need to tell you what she did. She came and she saw that Terry was struggling to get shoes on some of the smaller kids. So she came and sat herself down here on the chair, setting herself aside, she didn't take her pair of shoes but sat herself down and started helping Terry by picking up child after child and putting them on her lap so that Terry could put shoes on their feet like she's doing now. That's the heart of God. That's a heart of gratitude that goes beyond self.

That's what we need you to do today. I need you to have a heart like this young girl. If you would have a heart of gratitude that goes beyond yourself, that says, you know what? I'll go beyond me today. Honor this little girl, honor her heart for the children of her village.

Get online or dial that number on your screen. Make that gift in whatever way you can. Give the gift today. Give the gift of joy, the gift of shoes.

**End of video**

### **In the studio**

**SHEILA:** Thank you so much! If the lines are busy, keep calling. Let's make this the best Christmas that some of these children have ever known. And then I believe we have the right to share who sent us.

**RANDY:** Yeah. Lisa, we so appreciate you being on the show and sharing, not just your

heartache, but your healing. Thank you so much!

**LISA:** Thank you so much for having me!

**RANDY:** If you want to pick up Lisa's book, you can get them wherever books are sold.  
And Sheila, I don't think you knew this, she brought cookies!

**SHEILA:** Oh my gosh! The Lord be with this project! [Laughing]

**RANDY:** Thank you for being with us. We'll see you again next time here on *Life Today*.