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Week 37: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Susie Larson #1

SHEILA: Hi. Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh, here with Randy Robison. One of our favorite guests of all time is here with us in the studio and I know you love her. Susie, I just want to welcome you back to the show. You are such a deep well of all things good, and we're so happy you're here.

SUSIE: So honored to be here. We consider you great friends. So thank you for having me back.

SHEILA: So your new book, *Strong in Battle: Why the Humble will Prevail*. You mention something fairly early on and you describe it as a trauma, fear. Would you unpack that for us?

SUSIE: I open the book with a story about a time I was out of town for a writer's conference, but I woke up jarred awake just feeling utter horror and terror that my son was about to die. I have three sons and I had the sense that my 20-year-old was about to die. It was so visceral; it was such a demonic attack I can't even explain it. But I went face down and I was begging and pleading. And like where am I? Because I had forgotten I was out of town, and I was disoriented by it.

And the reason I open with that story is because there is a vast difference between trauma fears and God-given warnings. Trauma fears come from unresolved fears. What had happened was my son was making some choices in that season of life that was making me nervous. A few weeks earlier, I had opened the door to fear. And we're supposed to be

ruthless with fear, ruthless with insecurity. But by me kind of cracking that door open considering what if and having some conversations around that in my own heart, really gave the enemy full access to blast right in when I was most vulnerable. And it took me a little bit to get my footing.

The reason there is such a distinction is trauma fear can really tell you you cannot trust God, and it also shows us things that we've been letting linger in our souls that we do need to wrestle to the ground and find the truth about.

Where a God-given warning gives you sobriety, alertness, caution, a wisdom that says you must trust God. There is no autopilot. You stay engaged because you must trust God. I just think it is super important because the enemy is working overtime, really to traumatize and retraumatize so that he can get us always bracing for impact. And I know a little bit about bracing for impact.

RANDY: I wanted to touch on that. Would it be fair to say that the fear that gives you hope is more of God's warning, and the one that leaves you hopeless is the trauma type? Is that it?

SUSIE: I wish we could go back and maybe put that line in the book. That's fantastic! But you know the fear of the Lord brings safety and freedom. A right reference before the Lord is a right picture of who he is. But we magnify the Lord but what the enemy wants us to do is magnify our fears. I will not sit here and tell you I'm fearless. You know this. I've been on enough times to know that has been an Achilles heel for me, is fear, and it is something I've had to wrestle through. I'm not the person I once was.

But again, I'm not coming from good ideas, I'm coming from the actual experience of wrestling through and finding my footing every time that enemy comes after me with fear. He doesn't get to do that anymore.

SHEILA: You know maybe two or three weeks ago you sent me a text and in it you had

included a radio interview that you had done. I sent it to Randy too so we could both listen to it, and it was pretty staggering. I don't even know where to begin. But there was a line in there that caught my attention. You said because we all know that you have suffered a long, long time, but you basically said to God one night, kill me or heal me. What happened, Susie in the days and the weeks that followed?

SUSIE: Well, that night that you're talking about was the night before Easter a year ago. I love Easter and I love Christmas but there is something about Easter where I was always praying for a miracle with this health struggle. I don't know what it is about the season, but it always seemed to be the worst time for me when I'd have neurological flares that were terrifying. And it culminated last year with irregular heartbeats. Every time my heart started to beat irregularly, it caused numbing to shoot up my neck and into my jaw, blurred vision, and then just ice picks in my jaw joints. So it was a nightmare.

So the year before, I was pacing the floor claiming scripture, trying to do everything I could not be swallowed alive. By morning, it was Easter morning, my family was supposed to be coming over and I was so worn out. So in the middle of the night, I said you have to kill me or heal me. I don't have the mental bandwidth. I felt like I was going through life with a gun to my head about to have a stroke. And it was off and on, off and on continually, so I couldn't keep enduring that.

I got to this point afterward when I kind of got my bearings straight that I really, I thought of John the Baptist who baptized Jesus. Jesus said, "No greater man born to women."

He was there but when he was in obscurity, he was in prison, he sent his friends to say, "Are you the Christ?"

And Jesus came back to him and said, in my paraphrase, "You might be outside of the action right now, but the lame still leaps, the blind still see. I'm still working miracles. Blessed are you who are not offended."

I realized, had gotten, I love Jesus, I worshipped, but I had a hurt and I was really hurt. And so that was my work. So this is shortly after Easter a year ago, is to keep my heart pure before him. To go, somehow, I want to live in the tension of believing you for a miracle but not getting offended that I haven't gotten it yet. That's really a tension for someone when you deal with chronic illness.

So by the time I had gotten to this Easter, I didn't have a holy expectancy. I was just doing all I could do to steward the challenges in the work that God's given me to do. And out of the blue, all during the Lenten season, God charged three different groups of women to come towards me, to pray with me, and to walk with me until I'm healed. One of them was this darling sweet little Asian woman who had been reading my book since she is a good friend of a good friend of mine, but I hadn't met her yet. And her husband is a neurosurgeon. And when they were missionaries in Kenya, she got there and said, do you mean to tell me no prayer movements are happening here? So she ignited like seven different prayer movements: Prayers for doctors, for patients, for families. She's this little, sweet thing. You'd never know what a firecracker she is.

And so, every year before advent and Easter, she'd fast for 50 days, as a partial fast for Easter miracles and Advent miracles. And this year she said, Lord, this is my seventh year! You must have a very important assignment. He said, Susie Larson. And then the Lord allowed us to meet during the Lenten season. And she orchestrated this meeting of four women, that was one of my first prayer meetings during the Lenten season, and it utterly, literally changed my life what happened there.

RANDY: So for people that don't know, we're talking about the residual effects of over 30 years ago from Lyme disease?

SUSIE: Yes! And when you have chronic Lyme, you often have a genetic defect where you can't process mold. And so seven years ago, when I had a horrific relapse, I had exposure to black mold repeatedly, didn't know that and it attacked my brain. So I had

like seven areas in my brain. So as a talk radio host and an author, my tongue was going numb, my whole head is going numb. I couldn't spell. I was getting the wrong words in my sentences. It was terrifying. And I've been working my way back from that. So yeah.

RANDY: So we're talking about serious physical suffering. You used a phrase: Braced for impact. You always felt like -- what were you just tense all the time? What?

SUSIE: It is just interesting because my background is in fitness where I understand the parasympathetic and the sympathetic nervous system and vagus nerve and how all this works, rest and digest versus fight/flight. So I do all the deep breathing and stretching, and all the things I know to try to get my body out of fight/flight, but I couldn't. I felt like a foot was on the gas -- excuse me, on the gas in my body and so there was like a revving all the time. I couldn't sleep. It is so exhausting. When doctors would say, "Just do this."

I'm like, "I'm already doing that, ten times over!"

And because of the irregular heartbeat, they wanted to test my heart just to make sure it was healthy. My heart was healthy but my parasympathetic, which is rest/digest was flat-lined. There was no activity. You're supposed to be at rest and digest 80 percent of your day, 80 percent of your life. I was all in.

So I truly, in my physiology was stuck waiting for the next shoe to drop. I couldn't get myself out of it. Truly, it was like imprinted on my cells because this was such a traumatic experience that I've been walking through in the last seven years.

SHEILA: You talk about God bringing three different groups of women into your life who were committed to pray with you until you were healed. Tell us a little about Melissa.

SUSIE: Okay. So that little group of four with my little Esther friend, she is so sweet. I act like I'm so big because I'm 5'2" but she is smaller than me. So little Esther, I love her!

But she brought me together with a good friend of mine that we were mutual friends, and Melissa is a lawyer. I thought they were going to pray for this miraculous healing. I wasn't prepared for Melissa as a lawyer to start talking about the heavenly courts and litigation and charges. I don't know where she was going with this. She had handed me a tablet that on the front page it said "Client attorney privilege" with my name on it.

She said, "We're going into the courts of heaven." She goes, "I know you've worked through forgiveness for what the boys did to you when you were young."

And I counseled, I did all -- she said. "No, you did due diligence." But she said there are times when it truly imprints on our cells because it goes so deep. She said, "Do you remember the name of the four boys who beat you up?"

SHEILA: Because you were sexually assaulted. Yes?

SUSIE: I was, and physically; two separate occasions. One at nine, it was a sexual assault. At ten, I was jumped on the way home from school and beat up very badly. She said, "Do you know the boys' names that beat you up?"

Like, I don't.

She said okay. She said, "Did they punch you?"

"Yes."

"Write it down. Did they pull fistfuls of hair out?"

"Yes."

"Write it. Did they kick you?"

"Yes."

She goes, "You have to list the crime because in court the charges don't -- they hurt my feelings. You punched me. You kicked me."

She said, "The reason you need to do that is that these are charges deserving of punishment. And you can't release mercy until you have identified the crime."

I thought that is really good. Because if we minimize what's been done to us or minimize what we've done, we don't see the justice of God in full order.

When I walked through this prayer, so I wrote down, and we went through trauma after trauma, and the back of the tablet was a prayer. It went something like this: Let's say Brian was one of the --. Brian, I bring you before the heavenly courts. You are guilty of jumping a little girl and beating her, punching her, kicking. You are guilty and deserving of punishment. But because of the mercy that I've received from the Lord, I release mercy to you. You are forgiven, acquitted, and free.

And devil, you have no right to triangulate in this relationship anymore. I've pulled the hooks out of him and the hooks out of me. He is forgiven, I'm choosing mercy, and I will not commit double jeopardy. Any time you try to bait me back into any kind of offense, I choose mercy.

And one by one by one, we walked through the traumas that were still holding on.

What is so interesting is when I was begging God to help me sleep, because of the fight or flight I would sleep a couple of hours a night, and you can't function without sleep. And I'm like, God, I have a promise from scripture, I have a biblical case. I need sleep. And the more I prayed about sleep the more he scooped up one particular trauma that wasn't going away, and that's what ignited all these prayers.

And so as we walked through the trauma, I will tell you, when we prayed for the last thing, in my spirit I saw black soot just leave my body and I felt my cells go -- whoosh. I felt my whole body just go into rest and digest. I checked my pulse a couple of days later and it's dropped over 20 points. So my body released -- and that was the most significant release. And it is like your physiology, really, so responds to what you go through.

So as God started to do that healing, then layer by layer by layer more healing has come, and symptoms are slowly going away, and energy is coming. But the biggest thing for me is I'm not bracing for impact. I believe goodness and mercy follow me.

SHEILA: I love that! Talk about that, about if you're not believing that goodness and mercy are following you all the days of your life, then something is really wrong.

SUSIE: Yeah, something is out of alignment, and that's what one of these gals charged me with. She says, "If you don't believe goodness and mercy follow you, something is out of alignment, something needs to get healed."

The interesting thing with these women is that -- I was telling you backstage, they all come from different denominational streams, and we travel across denominational lines and people don't like that so much always because they want you to pick a lane so they can validate or vilify. Right? But we were like this is going to be heaven, the tribes. You're not going to put us in a box.

So to have God use these different women in a way that they have spoken into my life, I'm a focused passionate prayer but the way that these women are praying, these four women, with Melissa and Esther and Carna, when they get together with me on Wednesday mornings by zoom, I'm telling you, this is what's so amazing to me, I'm just so grateful. So I open up like the second prayer meeting with: God, thank you for these women. Bless their kids.

And Esther is like, "Excuse me. Excuse me, Susie?"

I'm like, "Yeah?"

She goes, "We have people who pray for us. We pray for you now, so you'll be with God. We agree with you, go!"

I'm like, "What?"

And they've shown up to pray for me and the night before she texts, "Where is the battle? What's the truth? How can we stand?"

And they're walking with me and I'm walking out a miracle. I've waited so long -- you know? And I don't know what to say that God would blindsides me when I didn't expect it. I was hopeful but he surprised me. It's kind of amazing.

SHEILA: One of the things that I don't remember from the interview, who was it, who spoke to you, but who told you that this suffering, it was because of your faithfulness. It wasn't like you'd done something wrong or you weren't doing something right. I think, Susie, just as you faithfully stewarded your suffering and I've watched from the sidelines for a long time, I can only begin to imagine the fruit that's going to come. Your best days in the kingdom are ahead, and I think we're all going to be changed by what God is doing in your life.

SUSIE: I receive that. I receive that. People, when you suffer long, people do wonder if you missed a step. I've heard plenty of that. I want to have a biblical theology on healing, but A plus B just doesn't always equal C. Lord, help me understand this. So I'm always trying to live in that tension. But to have a hopeful expectancy that anything can happen, but God will redeem it all.

But when that one gal of the different group, she is like a six-foot angel, walked up to me, to my book table, and all of these women were connected with women I trust which

helped. She said -- she whispered and kind of respected my privacy in a way. And she said, "Susie, I need you to know that you are not standing here unhealed because you lack faith. God has seen your fight. He has seen the way you stewarded this and there is a day that you're going to be healed and you're going to leap forward."

Now, I need to tell you that on Easter morning when I should have been making brunch, I had my face on our kitchen counter. I was weeping, and my sister and her husband and her boys came in. I had no food for them. They just came around and prayed for me. And my nephew Noah put his hand on me and said, "Lord, I get a sense that Susie is going to cross over from a ministry of trial to one of triumph." And when he said that it just quickened in me. And I will tell you, like a month earlier, I'm like, you're killing me here, God. I'm fighting for inches. And the Lord said, whatever you're gaining in the natural in inches you're gaining miles in the spiritual. And he gave me a word picture, and I was ducking behind enemy lines, kind of like a Navy Seal, which I like to --

SHEILA: You always like to think you're a Navy Seal.

SUSIE: Exactly! This is true. I'm deeking like a Navy Seal and I come up to this opening of this raging river. And I didn't slow down, I just took a leap, and an unseen hand propelled me forward and I crossed over and I was leaping with leaps and bounds. And the Lord led me to a passage in Isaiah, go through the water, you'll go to the fight. This might hurt you but it's not going to harm you.

And I just had this knowing that that day was coming. So when Noah said, "I believe you're going to cross over from a ministry of trial to triumph, and then this woman, during Lenten season said, the Lord has seen your struggle and you have been faithful with it, and the delay has not been your fault. And when the deliverance comes, you're going to help so many people. You're going to cross over. She used the same visual, the same imagery -- and I didn't even know her. This is how I knew the time had come -- the time had come. So here we are.

RANDY: Say that again because you said something about gaining inches and gaining miles.

SUSIE: Yeah! Yeah! It's another one of those times that my feelings were hurt. I mean I'm a handful, but God is still gracious to me. I was telling him my feelings were hurt. But I'm army crawling through this valley. It seems like I'm fighting for every inch, and it felt like that. He said, "Every inch you're gaining in the natural you're gaining miles in the spiritual." And that helped me.

RANDY: I think some people need to hear that because people are -- they're wanting the end of the battle. And your book, *Strong in Battle* because you've been in the battle for so long, what do you say to that person that is in that position where they're like how long? How long will I sing this song? I'm waiting patiently for you. Are you going to hear my cry? Do I get to the victory part? What do they need to know when they're in that battle?

SUSIE: Such a good question. You know when I wrote *Strong in Battle* is the Lord decides when the battle is over and that's a hard truth. But one of my other whiny, less mature moments I was like my hope is deferred and that's why my heart is sick. The Lord is like, look it up. So I looked up the verse and I did a little study, and it turns out that hope deferred, the word deferred in that verse is a verb. So when you throw off hope your heart will be sick, your heart cannot live without hope.

And so, the reason I was heartsick is I had thrown off hope. Hope doesn't disappoint. Dr. Warren Wiersbe said, "This isn't a hope-so hope, it is a know-so hope." We are anchored to the eternal one and his promises are true. And so I would say keep a close watch on your heart. Stay in a place of courage and hope. Did not isolate. Don't disengage. If I could bring you back around to John the Baptist, blessed are those who are not offended by him. That is a hard place, I know it. But as you were saying, there nothing is wasted.

Life on earth is short and what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed to us later. We believe some of that glory has already started and is already

coming. And I believe we are right now in the midst of a massive move of God. Prodigals are going to be coming home and bodies are going to be healed. We're going to see families reconciled. I feel like I know it in my knower. It's coming.

SHEILA: You know that verse, that John the Baptist verse, I cannot tell you how much time I've spent in that message Jesus sent back, will you still love me when you don't understand? Will you keep following?

So as you can probably tell, you're going to want this book for yourself, *Strong in Battle: Why the Humble will Prevail*. It is an ongoing work in Susie's life, and we have the privilege of walking with her.

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, well, 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

>> The day my child was born, I was so very happy. But seeing the shape of my little baby's mouth broke my heart. My child has to know love and happiness like anyone else, but everyone just turns their eyes and looks away. Each day I pray that God will send someone to help us. What's a mother to do?

ANNOUNCER: Each day another child already destined to grow up in a developing country, is born with yet another challenge from birth to overcome, cleft lip or cleft palate. And the question remains, what's a mother to do?

Fortunately, every year at this time, *LIFE Outreach International* and our mission partners around the world seek children who need corrective surgery through our Christmas Shoes and Smiles emphasis. The corrective surgery provides them a gift for a lifetime, a smile that will last forever.

We also see children smile when they receive shoes to protect their feet from injury and disease. This Christmas season, help answer the question of what's a mother to do by providing Christmas Shoes and Smiles to children in need.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: When I look at these little faces and I think of the mom, you know when you're having a baby the first thing you do when that little one's born is you just want to look at their little face and count their toes and count their fingers. But for so many moms in difficult parts of the world, when their child is born with cleft lip or cleft palate, not only is that seen as something that will be a real struggle and can potentially impact, a baby can't nurse from its mother with cleft palate. But not only that, in so many of the countries we work in, it's seen as a curse from God. And so that child from the moment that they take their first breath, they're sidelined, they're kept away.

And the fact that we work with these amazing doctors on the ground, who have been able to say for \$500 we can do one of these surgeries, we can perform cleft lip, cleft palate surgery and give that child a whole new life. I don't know about you, but I know for me, I don't need one more sweater this Christmas. I don't need another pair of boots. But what a joy it would be if we decided this Christmas it was going to be about other people. And get your whole family, get your Sunday School room, get everybody together and say, let's today remember that we were lost till Jesus came. And now because we've been found we can make a difference in the lives of others. I know you know this too, Randy, when we're on the field there with these people, so so often they will receive the gift but then they'll want to know why did you do this?

RANDY: Yeah, why would you do this? Who are you? That's the beauty of going out in Jesus' name. Scripture says we are his hands and his feet. God has this pattern in the Bible of partnering with people to help other people. And so when we reach out in Jesus'

name and do something very practical, whether it's providing that surgery for the cleft lip and cleft palate or putting shoes on these children who don't have shoes, who need some protection on their feet, when we do that in Jesus' name, we fulfill the scripture. And notice this, we answer the prayer of that mother that looks at her baby and says, God -- sometimes, God, if you're real, maybe if you care, if you exist, can you help me? And he sends you and me to do it.

We've been doing this for several years and it's been such a blessing. I hope that you'll be a part of it this year. We've put shoes on over two and a half million children so far. We've provided surgeries for 2,500 children. We want to increase that. We want to do more this year, but we have to have your help.

Here's the short version, \$180 will put shoes on 50 children's feet. If you want to do a surgery, they're on average \$500 each. Whatever you can do, we're just asking you, let's reach out this Christmas and say, Christmas is about Christ. We're here in the name of Jesus. We want to fulfill that need you have. Will you do that? Will you do it right now? Do it today. We need to do it early so we can get it there in time for Christmas. I pray you'll go to the phone or go online and 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

On the mission field

Tammy: This is just one of millions of children all around the world in desperate need of a simple pair of shoes. I am so privileged to be a part of *LIFE Outreach* who not only brings Water for LIFE, Rescue for LIFE, food programs but also shoes; shoes to children who desperately need them to protect their little feet from cuts, from tears, from even waterborne illness that may get into the cut and infect it. Gosh, we can go on and on and on until the end result is that they could lose their very feet.

Please why don't you join me today? Go to your phone or go online and do whatever you can to make a difference just one child at a time -- one pair of shoes at a time.

End of clip

In the studio

SHEILA: Thank you so much. If the lines are busy, keep calling. Let's be determined that we're going to do this. And for any gift at all, please request a copy of Susie's new book, *Strong in Battle: Why the Humble will Prevail*. Could we talk you into staying and doing one more program with us?

SUSIE: I would be so honored! Let's do it!

SHEILA: Okay. Awesome!

RANDY: I appreciate you doing that. And we appreciate all of you watching. We'll see you again next time here on *Life Today*.

SHEILA: Bye!