

9/7/22

Week 37: Christmas Shoes and Smiles

Sheila Walsh

Jeanne Stevens

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. And I'm so glad you've carved out this little niche to be with us today. And you're going to be glad too because I have an amazing guest. Her book is called *What's Here Now?* : How to stop rehashing the past and rehearsing the future and start receiving the present.

Jeanne Stevens, it is a joy to have you with us.

JEANNE: Thank you, Sheila. It is such a blessing to be with you and with all of your listeners. I'm excited about our conversation.

SHEILA: I am too. Before we dive into this book, tell us a little bit about yourself.

JEANNE: Absolutely. I'm married to the love of my life, 25 years of marriage. I can't believe it! I feel like I want to tell people we got married when we were 15. How can I be married for 25 years? We have two young kids that are in middle school and high school; so I guess they're not all that young. So we're in that adolescent age of parenting.

SHEILA: May the Lord be with you.

JEANNE: Exactly! Thank you. Thank you! I know I'm going to make it through. I used to be a youth pastor many years ago so I'm like okay, I helped so many other parents, somebody is going to come along and help me.

And we pastor a church in downtown Chicago called Soul City Church. We started it in our living room about 12 years ago and it was a handful of people and we've just watched the miracles of God grow this incredible ministry. We're all about transformation. We want to lead people into a transforming relationship with Jesus; that's the heartbeat of our church.

SHEILA: The thing I love about that is so often we are keen to get people to make decisions as far as Christ asked us to disciple people so that they know what it is like to run hard after Jesus.

JEANNE: Absolutely! And we're all always transforming. We're all ever-changing. And so that's what life in the kingdom looks like, is constantly being transformed. We shouldn't look the same as we did a week ago, a year ago, ten years ago. We should ever be transforming. And so we want to walk with people on that journey; not just introducing them to Jesus but learning how to walk with him throughout their *LIFE*.

SHEILA: You said this is your first book which is surprising to me because A, it is brilliantly written and there is so much wisdom. It is like a deep well. The title *What's Here Now?* Unpack that for us.

JEANNE: Yeah. I decided to use a question because Jesus used questions.

SHEILA: Always.

JEANNE: And he asked, I think, over 300 and only answered three. And so Jesus wanted to stir the soul of people through questions. And for me, about three or four years into leading Soul City, which is the name of our church, I just felt like, Sheila, doing the work of God was starting to deteriorate the work of God in me. I was tired, I was exhausted, I was burnt out. I was not leading people to the Good Shepherd, I was just leading them to this shepherd -- just drained and dry. And my soul was weary.

A mentor came into my life, and I'll never forget him saying to me, "I think I know what's going on here. You're not here."

And I remember we were meeting in a coffee shop. I was like, "No, I'm here. I'm here in this Corner Bakery with you."

And he's like, "No, Jeanne. No, you're not present. You're either rehashing the past or rehearsing the future, and you're not receiving the gift of this now moment."

And so he gave me this question, "*What's Here Now?*"

And he said, "I want you to start asking this question."

And so I downloaded this little app on my phone and had it like prompt a question periodically throughout my day. And I would ask this question, *What's Here Now?* And I made this commitment to myself that whenever the question came up, I would just pause, I would breathe, and I would answer the question, *What's Here Now?*

And oftentimes I realized, okay, I'm either trying to change things that already happened. Like in my mind, I'm trying to change things in the past or I'm out in the future trying to control all of the things that have yet to happen. And I realized, okay, if this is what's going on with me if I'm not here, then this might be the tension that so many others are living in; that we're not really here in this present moment.

And so I started to begin to practice the presence of God. What I realized is that the zip code of God, like if you want to know the location of God, is in this now moment. Right here, you and me, we are tasting the presence of God. No other place to be, no other place to go, just with one another. And that's how we experience the gift of presence.

And I realized that when I started to live in the present moment I could see God, I could see myself more clearly, and I could see others. And so tasting the gift of presence was

kind of this gift of how can I keep returning to the present moment? Yeah, that's where the book came from.

SHEILA: How has that impacted you in the hard moments? Because the last two, two and a half years have been really difficult. But you've also been through some loss and some challenges. How has this awareness of the presence of God now impacted you in those days?

JEANNE: Yeah, I realized that there were some consistent bread crumbs for when people rehash the past or rehearse the future. When we're rehashing the past the signs, if you will, the bread crumbs, blame is there, shame, which I just like to say shame is self-hatred at my experience. Like if you spell out the word shame, self-hatred at my expense, right? Unprocessed grief, guilt, and trying to be in places that you are not.

Unprocessed grief is a big one in my life. A bit of my story is that I have had a lot of sudden losses in my life. The sudden loss of my father. He was running in a triathlon, and we got a call that he had fallen on the race course and immediately died. And there was a before and an after; that's what grief is. I write about the sudden loss of my younger brother. In the middle of the night he just stopped breathing, and I got a call from my sister-in-law. And you know, quickly she just said, "Please come here right now." I walked into their home, and he was gone.

Especially in the last two years that we have all walked through, we are all carrying around grief. And when we don't process our grief, when we don't work through our grief, our grief has nowhere to go. And grief is meant to grow something in our life. It is meant to produce something in us if you will. And grief, in so many ways, is another way to describe love. We've lost something that we love. And if we don't process through that loss of love, it pops out in other places in our lives. And so many people are walking around with unprocessed grief, unprocessed loss, especially from these last two years. I found that those are a few of the ways that we rehash the past.

And then there are all kinds of ways that we try to rehearse the future. Worry is a big one and I think so many of us in the last two years, have found ourselves worrying. And worry is living in a not yet that is worse than your now. You're living in a fictitious not yet, but you don't know if it is going to happen that way, but you're making it worse than your now. I like to tell people if it is not happening now, it is not happening. But so many of us, right, are living in our not happenings. We even have developed this term called fomo, the fear of missing out. That there is a there that's better than your here. And so often that's how we rehearse the future, right, through worry, through denial, through pretending -- that's another one, obligation. I think, Sheila, this is a huge one for women, we are just conditioned to say yes, to live under shoulds.

SHEILA: I have learned that no is a complete sentence. I'm thinking of getting it tattooed. [Laughing]

JEANNE: Right? It is! I think we just need to start practicing it more and more and more. No! Period! But that is a tension for so many of us. And then control, trying to control everything in our lives. I'm a recovering control addict -- an active recovering control addict. And I think these are just the ways that we leave the present moment.

And yet, God describes himself as our ever-present help in trouble. Ever present! And to experience the presence of God, we have to learn how to be here -- to be here with one another.

SHEILA: My husband and I were watching a program the other night; it was called *Love on the Spectrum*, and it is this darling program about young people who are on the autism spectrum. This one girl is just stuck in her life. When someone questions her she says, it is anxiety. It is the what-ifs. What if I go outside the door? What if he doesn't like me? What if? What if? As believers, those should not control our lives.

How have you seen, you and your husband co-pastor this amazing church, what do you see going on amongst the body of Christ?

JEANNE: I think we are stuck in the what-was and the what-ifs. Exactly the story that you just mentioned from that program. We get ourselves stuck in a loop of everything that was, and so we are not doing the good, necessary work of healing from the stories in our past, digging in the dirt of what was and healing those patterns. Or we're getting stuck in a loop of all of our what-ifs and so we're not experiencing presence. You can tell, right, when you're with somebody if they're present with you. You can tell. I think so often we get so distracted. Our devices are a fast way to leave presence instantly; we leave presence.

I find it so interesting this moment in Exodus where Moses is just done with the Israelites, he is so exhausted from leading them. They complain about everything. They're constantly living in what was and what ifs. And he says essentially to God, what am I to do? God answers him and says, my presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. And Moses responds to God and says, well good because I don't want to go if you're presence doesn't go with me.

SHEILA: I love that scripture.

JEANNE: Yes! And he got to a point in his life where he didn't want even the plans of God or the promises of God, the provision of God. He was like it's your presence. And I think as followers of Jesus, I think as kingdom-minded people, we don't crave the presence of God. We just want his plans, we just want his promises, we just want his provisions, and we want him to put an email in our inbox each morning with all of the ways that life is going to unfold.

And yet, I have realized that that spiritual formation is consenting to what is. It is consenting to reality. None of us is going to escape this life without learning how to let go, without learning how to surrender. It is the model of Jesus. And we fight surrender every time. I know I do. I struggle with surrender and yet this is the way to be in the present with Jesus, to surrender to what is.

SHEILA: I love that so much because I think I've spent so much of my life trying to get everything right. I remember I had a health scare a couple of years ago and I was praying and praying and praying, and I realized at the end, that what I wanted wasn't so much an answer to my prayer, it was the presence of Christ in the midst of what was going on that changed everything.

What would you say to somebody who is like, I can see it in your eyes, I can see it in your face, I want to begin to live like this, how do I even start?

JEANNE: It's why I chose to ask the question *What's Here Now?* I do think that Jesus so beautifully taught it to us when he was asked. Okay, what's the most important thing for us to know? And he pulled back to the Shema. He said, "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength." And so he essentially said you need to learn how to pay attention to your body, to your heart, and to your mind.

And so when I ask this question what's here now, I just pause, I breathe, and I start by saying okay, what am I sensing in my body? The amazing thing about the body is it's incapable of lying to us. Right? It cannot lie to us. If you have a headache, there is a reason for that headache. If you have an ache in your back, there is a reason for that ache in your back. It is not some covert message the body is trying to send. It is sending a very understandable message to us, there is something wrong.

Yet, as Christ followers, we have not learned how to pay attention to our bodies. We've denied our bodies. We haven't listened to what our body is trying to say. So I'll start with what am I sensing in my body? Then I'll move to my heart space, what am I feeling in my heart? And I think so many of us, we've grown up becoming so afraid of emotions. And emotions, an emotion isn't asking for an answer. An emotion is just looking for a healthy space to be felt; and yet so many of us haven't learned what to do with our emotions. The tendency is to fight, flight, or freeze when an emotion shows up that we're uncomfortable with.

I think Christians have added a fourth to that. We try to fix it. Right? And anger isn't looking to be fixed, sadness isn't looking to be fixed, it is just looking to be felt. So when I ask myself what am I sensing here in my body? What am I feeling in my heart? I notice it, I name it, and then I offer some loving nurture to that.

And then the final is what am I thinking in my mind? Humans have anywhere from 60,000-80,000 thoughts in a day. That's a lot of thoughts, and not all of those thoughts are helpful thoughts. Right? And so often I think, we take that passage, take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.

I think for many of us, we are letting our thoughts take us captive, and our thoughts are controlling our lives. I think one of the things we can begin to do is just notice our thoughts. And not, I like to think of my thoughts almost like planes flying over my head, right? And so many of us clear every thought for landing, and no wonder our brains are so congested with thoughts. And God essentially has said you're the air traffic controller. You don't have to clear every thought for landing.

So for us, we go, that thought isn't true, that thought isn't helpful, that thought isn't pure, that thought isn't kind, that thought isn't filled with the fruits of the spirit. I'm not going to clear that thought for landing.

That's the simplicity of coming back to the present moment, *What's Here Now?* What am I sensing in my body? What am I feeling in my heart? What am I thinking in my mind? And you can come back to this now moment then.

SHEILA: One of my favorite parts of the book is when you start receiving the present. I was finding it -- my husband and I were talking about it this morning after I read your book, and we were talking about how much time we've spent going over things from the past. I mean obviously, there are as you say, you need to deal with them and receive healing. Or thinking about what if? But there is something, the gift of the present and the

gift of Christ in the present is life-changing.

So when people finish reading this book, what is your prayer, Jeanne that would have happened in them?

JEANNE: I love that question, Sheila, because to sit down and to write a book, you know this, it is so much energy and authors pour their hearts and their souls into these words, right? And so I certainly am not just hoping that somebody picks it up and says, oh, that was a great book!

My hope and my prayer is that people learn how to return to the present moment, and they experience God, they experience what it means to be fully alive, to be here, to be fully themselves, and to belong to one another. I think that is what we are craving with one another. We are craving connection. We are craving authentic vulnerability. And we're craving belonging. We just want to know, do you see me? I think that is the deepest human desire, do you see me, and do you love me? And when we come back into the present moment, you know the present is the only place to experience love.

SHEILA: That's a great thought.

JEANNE: You can't go back to your past and experience love. You can't go out into your future and experience it. And God is, of course, the same yesterday, today, and forever, but the only place to taste the presence of God is in this now moment. It's the only place to experience the movement of God. You're not going to experience the movement of God in your past or he will, of course, be there in your future but if you want to taste and see the goodness of the Lord you have to come into this moment. So my prayer is that people will learn how to live here, to be here, to be themselves, and to fully belong to one another.

SHEILA: Our world is longing to see what that looks like. As you can tell, Jeanne is a deep well. There is so much wisdom. It is almost like a road map she's left for each one

of us. I'm going to tell you how you can get a hold of your own copy of Jeanne's book.

But first of all, I want you to watch this. There is something -- it is a little early, we're not close to Christmas quite yet but there are some things we do here at the *LIFE* to make sure that when Christmas comes there are some people around the world who know there is a God, and he sees them. Watch this.

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: I love those faces. I love seeing those smiling faces on those children getting their first pair of shoes, and also those darling little ones who have that reparative surgery that basically gives them their life back.

I know it's a little bit early to talk about Christmas, but we do it very intentionally at this time of the year so that we're able to get everything in order to make sure that help gets to where it needs to get by Christmas time. And we want you to be part of it.

It is one of the most amazing things to think that something like this, a shoe that costs, we get it for \$3.60 could literally save the life of a child. But as the piece said, often those illnesses come through cuts in the foot, and then hookworm can do all sorts of things. Children can end up malnourished because of hookworm; it can even get into their brains.

But we have these amazing doctors on the ground who are able and willing to do a surgery for \$500. In so many of these countries, when a child is born like that either with cleft lip or cleft palate, it is seen almost as a curse from God, and they're ostracized, they're held back. Also, a child like that can't eat properly and they end up malnourished. \$500 is like saying here's your life back. What a joy to be able to do that.

Also, for any gift at all, this is our little shoe this year, we always have a new one every year, and this is a lovely scarlet shoe. And you hang it on your tree, and it will remind you to pray for these children. So we have made a commitment that by Christmas, we're

going to be able to provide 150,000 pairs of shoes. That will be 150,000 children who will have the very first pair of shoes they've ever had in their life. Here's how that kind of breaks down. For \$36 you can provide shoes for ten children. Think about that! Think of the money we waste at Christmas time. But that would give ten children a covering for their feet so they can run around and be like children. \$72 will give shoes to 20 children. And also \$1,000 will either provide 275 pairs of shoes or two corrective surgeries.

What a joy at this time of the year as we look forward to the advent, to the coming of Christ -- here's the thing, a pair of shoes for a child in a country like that can give them their life back. But what we're celebrating at Christmas is that Christ came. He came to give us access, a way back to the Father so that we can have our life. So let's -- let's go against our culture. Our culture tells us we need more and more and more stuff for ourselves. No, we don't. Our treasures are laid up in heaven where no one can touch it. Let's make sure that this year we're going to give and give and give because we have been given to.

Please, go to your phone, and make the very best gift you can. Go online. Let's make this Christmas all about Jesus. And because it is about Jesus, it is about us giving. 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

In the studio

SHEILA: Thank you for doing that. Keep calling if the lines are busy. For any gift at all, you can ask for Jeanne's book, *What's Here Now?*

Honestly, Jeanne, I want to thank you for the way you've poured so much of your life into this and the wisdom that God has taught you through the years. And so I just want to say thank you.

JEANNE: Thank you, Sheila. Thank you for the gift that you are to me and to so many others, inviting us into this life of walking with Jesus in the kingdom of God. You are just a sage and I have benefited from who you are. Thank you.

SHEILA: It doesn't get any better than this. We love you and we will see you next time on *Life Today*. Thanks for being with us.