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Week 40: Christmas Shoes and Smiles, Last week

Sheila Walsh

"Peace at the Feet of Jesus"

SHEILA: Hi, I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm so grateful that you've taken this time out to sit with me for a while. I've been asking myself some questions over the last three or four days. I read an article and they were basically describing the impact, the longer-term impact of the whole COVID pandemic. They were talking about the fact that people are struggling. I have to be honest, when I thought about it, I thought I've been struggling myself these days.

What they said in this study, and I don't know how reliable the study is but they said that four or five percent of the population are doing way, way better than before the pandemic began, 20 percent are in a really, really bad place, and the rest they said, they used this word *languishing*. I thought it was an interesting word. When I looked it up in the Webster dictionary it means an absence of well-being even though you're not sick. Or an inability to describe your feelings. Or feeling as if there is nothing to look forward to.

So I have made a new commitment to stay engaged daily, hourly if I need to, with what is true and what is eternal. I wrote down in my diary last night, "Do not forget we're an Easter people." What I mean by that is you know when we study the life of Christ and this amazing man who walked on this earth and healed people and cared for people and saw people who everybody else would miss, and then he was crucified, if that was the end of our story we would remember him and think what an amazing person he was.

But that's not the end of our story. Because Christ rose again from the dead that changes

everything. It means that no matter what you're going through right now, no matter what I'm going through, no matter what our nation and our world are going through, because of Jesus everything is changed.

In John's gospel, he gives us some of Christ's last words to his closest friends. He said this and you probably know this verse. You find it in John 14, I believe: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

Hmm! Part of Christ's final conversation with his closest friends. Now he knows what they're hoping for. All Jews were hoping that Messiah would come riding into Jerusalem and get rid of the Roman occupation and they would be liberated. But Jesus knows what's going to happen. Jesus said to them and us, he said he gives us his peace.

Here's the difference for peace to work in the world, circumstances have to change. You know there has to be some, if one nation is against another nation there has to be like peace talks before there can be any change. But the thing I want to remind you of is that we can know Christ's peace even if nothing changes. The word that's used there in John 14 is a word, the Greek word is eirene and it means this—now listen to this because I think it is brilliant—total well-being and security because God's presence is with his people.

Think about that, total well-being and security, not because everything is going well in your life but because God's presence is with his people. So for you and I, peace is not the absence of trouble, it is the very present presence of Christ in every moment.

When I was back home in London a few years ago, I was walking through the park, and I saw a gentleman sitting by himself. And he just looked—he just looked sad. I had sandwiches and I had a soda that I'd gotten at the store, and I felt the Holy Spirit prompting me. So I went up and said to him, "Hey, sir! Do you mind if I join you?"

He said, "No. Sure!"

So I sat down beside him and shared my sandwiches and we just sat quietly for a little while. And then he began to tell me something about his life. It was shocking. He was a very well-respected doctor at one point in Harley Street in London. You might not be familiar with that but that's where kind of the top—the cream of the crop of doctor specialties—have their offices on Harley Street, and that's who he was.

But he became a victim of alcoholism and the more he drank the greater impact it had on his life. And he told me that eventually he lost his license, he lost his wife, and he lost contact with his children. I think the saddest thing he said to me that day as I got up to leave was, "One day I was walking along the streets, and I caught my reflection in a store window. And my first thought was oh my gosh, who is that man?" And he said, "I suddenly realized it's me! This is what I have become."

Let me ask you, have you ever had a moment like that? Now not so dramatic, obviously, but do you ever look at where your life is and think, how did I get here? This was not the plan. But to that place, no matter how far gone you could feel, Jesus speaks peace.

What you might be tempted to ask is how can such a thing be possible? Well, let me just say this, here's the truth. Christ would not have promised it if it was not possible. There are over 6,000 promises in the Bible and they're all fulfilled in Christ. One of the most amazing stories recounted in the New Testament illustrates Christ's power over every storm in life; the storms that are like physical storms outside our life and the storms that you and I might face that are inside of us.

So let's set the scene in Mark chapter four. Here's what we read: *As evening came Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." So they took Jesus in the boat and started out leaving the crowds behind, although other boats followed. But soon a fierce storm came up, high waves were breaking into the boat and it began to fill with water. Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The*

disciples woke him up shouting, "Teacher! Don't you care that we're going to drown?" When Jesus woke up he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" And suddenly the wind stopped and there was a great calm.

Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!"

Now it is interesting, I don't know if you've ever been to Israel but the mountains that surround Galilee, violent storms often blow up like this storm but this one was particularly violent, the waves were actually crashing over the side of the boat. I think it is fascinating that it is after Christ has spoken to the storm that we read that they were afraid and said, "Who is this man?" You know that was a Messianic thing that Christ did. It says in Psalm 89, verse nine: *You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.*

So they've just come through this horrible storm. They've watched Christ do something they've never seen before. Then suddenly out of this violent storm, there is complete calm. Well, the disciples, they're still reeling from that when the boat touches the edge of the shore. And we're about to see that when Christ speaks to storms outside our lives and inside our lives both have to obey.

We're going to meet another man who is horrified by what he had become. This is what we read in Mark chapter five: *Jesus and his followers went to the other side of the lake to the area of the Gadarene people. When Jesus got out of the boat, instantly a man with an evil spirit came to him from the burial caves. This man lived in the caves and no one could tie him up, not even with a chain. Many times people had used chains to the man's hands and feet but he always broke them off. No one was strong enough to control him. Day and night he would wander around the burial caves and on the hills screaming and cutting himself with stones. While Jesus was still far away the man saw him, ran to him,*

and fell down before him.

I don't know if you noticed that little phrase at the beginning of the text in Mark five. Jesus said, "We'll go to the other side." That was terrifying to a Jew. The setting is the eastern shore of Galilee, the Gentile Decapolis, which is ten pagan cities, a place of pagan cult worship and keeping pigs and animals unclean to the Jews. And this man is living among the dead, which is unclean by any Jewish law.

Think about it, a man with an unclean spirit living among the unclean dead surrounded by people in unclean territory. This was unimaginable for the disciples. But I think the description of this man, in fact, Bob Bennett once did a song, you should Google it, it is called "Man of the Tombs." Such a moving song! But the description of this man is one of the saddest, I think, in the Bible. Even in life, even while he is still breathing, he is living among the dead.

The original Greek emphasizes his strength, and it translates: Not even by chains could anyone any longer restrain him. And he was treated like an animal. But then we read this: *When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him.*

Now, why would he do that? This man has never heard of Jesus. Jesus has never been to this part of the countryside before. I think it's fascinating that the poor man did not know Jesus but the demons that possessed him did. I'm pretty sure that for the first time in this man's life when suddenly his eyes saw Jesus coming, the demons inside of him went ah! And pulled back because they recognized the Son of God.

The word used for *fell down* isn't the word used for just to fall over something. It is the word that's used to fall in worship. And I love this! When the demonic meets the divine there is no contest.

Do you remember what they said? "My name is Legion," this is the demon speaking, "for we are many." A Roman legion is about 5,600 soldiers. So they begged Jesus not to send

them out of the region because the Decapolis was an area dominated by forces of darkness, hostile to Christ. They knew their time was limited and they wanted to destroy as many people as they could.

So think about that scene. It doesn't say that the disciples ever got out of the boat. I'm not sure I blame them. There is chaos everywhere apart from one place. *They came to Jesus and saw the man who used to have the many evil spirits sitting, clothed, and in his right mind; and they were frightened.* Beautiful, clothed, and in his right mind. Only God! It seems like the powers of darkness were hell-bent on keeping Jesus from this poor man. But the storm didn't stop Christ then and it won't stop him now.

I was praying for you today before I came to the studio. I was just asking the Lord, and let me ask you, where are the storms in your life? *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.* The word there *troubled* is like a word you would use for a perfect storm. You might find yourself in a place right now where it feels like the perfect storm. Maybe there is trouble in your family. Maybe there is trouble in your marriage. Perhaps you're worried about your children. Maybe you have a child who's gone off and they're unrecognizable to you now. So often we think well, I understand that I could have peace when something is resolved but the thing that Christ promises us is that we can know peace right now. No matter what you are facing right at this moment, you can have peace.

I've known that in my own life. I found the peace of Christ in a psychiatric ward. I found the peace of Christ in a bankruptcy court. I just want you to know there is nowhere that you can go, no place you'd find yourself in where you cannot experience the peace of Christ.

And where is it found? Always found at the feet of Jesus. Some days, probably like you, I find myself able to pray great prayers, and other days I feel like I'm languishing sometimes. But I have to tell you, honestly, when I find myself in a place where I'm not quite sure what to do, I will get down on my knees and raise my arms and I will

experience the peace of Christ. See he didn't say he would get us out of everything but he did say that he would be with us in whatever we're going through.

I just want you to know you have a family here at *LIFE*. You see a few of us in front of the camera; there is a whole family of amazing people who pray for you, who ask God to bless you. And as we ask God to bless you, we ask you if you would help us. When I was thinking about the powerful image of kneeling at the feet of Jesus, it made me think about one of my favorite missions that we have here at *LIFE Outreach* and that's Christmas Shoes and Smiles, the joy of being able to put a pair of shoes just like this onto a child who has never known what it is like to be protected that way. But not only that, one of my favorite things in the world is when my son smiles. He can make me laugh like nobody else on the planet. But can you imagine what it is like if you give birth to your little one and there is a cleft lip and cleft palate, and they can't smile and they can't eat normally and they can't lay down to sleep? It's really a terrible thing.

And that's why, as a family here at *LIFE*, we are committed to making a difference. Now I know it is a little early to talk about Christmas but we do that now so that we're able to get everything in place so it becomes the greatest Christmas some of these children have ever experienced. So let me take you on a trip with me and let's see the difference that's made when we're able to restore a smile on the face of a child. Watch this.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: Every year in developing countries around the world, more than 170,000 children are born with a cleft lip or cleft palate. Without surgical repair, a cleft lip or palate could be deadly for a child.

DR. HODGES: As a child grows with a cleft palate, they will not be able to breastfeed and that can cause real problems for nutrition. And it can also cause them to have more commonly, chest infections, and that could even lead to death.

ANNOUNCER: Beyond just the physical dangers, the cleft lip or palate can cause lasting emotional and psychological damage to a child.

DR. HODGES: Then, as they start to talk, they will not be able to be understood. Cleft palate makes their speech very, very difficult to understand. And so combining the appearance and also the speech will have a huge impact on how that child feels about themselves as they grow up.

ANNOUNCER: Fortunately, a cleft lip or a cleft palate can be repaired fairly easily with corrective surgery. But a child living in poverty has very little hope and even fewer options for this type of surgery.

That's why *LIFE Outreach* and its partners have already provided more than 2,000 life-changing surgeries at no cost to the families. And this year, we will continue to do as many surgical cleft repairs as possible around the world.

DR. HODGES: Thanks to partners like *LIFE Outreach International*, we're able to make lasting changes in children's lives through corrective surgery. Just to give an example from the clinic this week, I saw several children that we've operated on their lips and their palates, very young, and the children are healthy, they look normal, and I know that they will now be able to speak normally as well.

But there is so much more work to be done. Literally, thousands of families are waiting for help, but we can only do it with your continuing support. God bless you.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: So let's do this. What a great opportunity to be able to restore a smile to a child. We have just amazing, amazing doctors like the one you just saw on the ground. And do you know that we can do, for \$500 we can do a corrective surgery? If you were

able to give \$1,000, perhaps God has blessed your business this year or you've been putting something away for something, and just waiting for the Lord to place it on your heart what it should be, wouldn't that be an amazing Christmas gift?

Now, this is our last week of Christmas Shoes and Smiles. We have made a pledge to get 150,000 pairs of shoes to children around the world in all the countries we work in. They look pretty simple. We're able to do them for \$3.60 which means that if you could commit to \$36 we can send ten pairs of shoes to children. And it is not just a case of it's nice to have shoes, it literally can save their lives. Because when their feet are bare and they're running around and they're in this water that's contaminated, they can get hookworm, they can get all sorts of diseases that can be life-threatening.

So I'm excited at the thought of our whole family gathering together this year and saying, let's not make Christmas about what we can get, let's make it about acknowledging the greatest gift that's ever been given—and that's when Christ left his glorious place to be born with a shoe size for you and for me. So I'm inviting you to join with us. As I said, this is our last week: \$72, 20 pairs of shoes, so \$180, 50 pairs of shoes. Now if you're able to do \$1,000, that's 275 pairs of shoes or two corrective surgeries.

For any gift at all, we'll send you this, this is our Christmas shoe this year, this little red crystal shoe. For \$100 or more we have this beautiful ornament box of shoes. What I love about this is that when you put them on your Christmas tree, and when you see them, it gives us an opportunity to not just send a gift but to pray for the child who received that gift.

There are so many moms in the world who are heartbroken at the moment because the first time they get to see their precious little one, they see that there is something wrong that will not only impact their health but how they're received by other people. You know what it's like. You want your children to be able to play with other friends and feel like they fit in. But when a child is born like that, it is so, so difficult, and that's why it is a joy to let you know we can change that.

So last week! Will you please, if you've been thinking of calling and just haven't gotten around to it, please call right now. Give the very best gift you can. So let's put smiles on a lot of faces and shoes on a lot of little feet.

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!"

This is the last week! Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

On the mission field

ISAK: I'm going to tell you what a happy day this is for me. I'm here with 20 kids who've all received shoes today because someone like you was generous enough to say I'll give \$72. Or maybe two of you gave \$36 and that gift of \$36 meant that ten or \$72 meant that 20 children got shoes here today.

Please, do it today. Get online or dial that number on your screen and give, give a gift, an extra-special above-normal gift that is the gift of shoes, the gift of joy. What that would mean is you would extend this line just that much further. You would extend the expression of God's heart and his hands to these children and you would extend the joy in villages just like this by giving these children the precious gift of a pair of shoes.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Thank you for staying with me. And if you tried to get through and the lines are busy, please keep calling. If you're able to give a gift of \$1,000 or more, we have this beautiful bronze that we would love to send to you that says, "Let the children come." It is a beautiful piece! And it is simply our way of saying thank you. But whatever you can do as a family, and let's make it a family project, let's make it a Sunday School project, a Woman's Bible study project, let's make an impact in the world this year because of the way that Christ, in His grace, has invited us to fall at his feet and receive the peace that comes only from him.

So for all of us here at *LIFE*, I'm Sheila Walsh, God bless you. We'll see you next time.