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Week 51: Fall Mission Feeding

Sheila Walsh

Lisa Harper

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh and I have a little treat for you. I don't often get a chance to watch the shows back because well, life's busy—cooking meals, vacuuming, walking dogs, you know all that stuff. But every now and again, I'll go through different things, and I'll stop on one or two programs that are just—I love so much. So that's what we're going to do today.

I had a chance to interview one of my—we've been friends, and I always think of her as my little sister. We've been friends for gosh, 35 years. When I used to live in Nashville, Lisa Harper was head of women's ministries at Christ Presbyterian. And I used to go to her Bible studies because they were so good. But you had to get there early because so many women wanted to go to her Bible study, so you wanted to get a seat.

But Lisa had a new book, it is a devotional and it's great! But having her here on set and having this interview, just watching it again made me realize just one of the many reasons why I love her. She is so—she is brilliant, she is working on her doctoral thesis at the moment. She is incredibly funny, and she is real. She's just transparent. And she and I have got up to some interesting things through the years. So I thought you might enjoy taking another look at this.

Begin video clip

SHEILA: Exactly! Couldn't have said it better myself and I wouldn't have put it that way

but there you go. It is called *LIFE*, an obsessively grateful, undone by Jesus, genuinely happy and not faking through the hard stuff kind of 100-day devotional.

[LAUGHTER]

It's so brilliant. Talk to me. What was the Genesis of this for you?

LISA: I almost blew us up. It was the beginning of COVID, and you know where we live, Missy and I live out in the boonies and all of the sudden, it was like I travel for work. Well, it was like, well, okay, these long months are stretched in front of us and I'm not a good couch potato. So I thought, I'll just do a little light landscaping. And you know, I'm single and so I have chainsaws. I thought I'm just going to cut down this tree because it would look better with a bush there, because I had time on my hands. I'm sawing this tree, the bottom of this tree with a chainsaw and I, you know me, I'm a little bit of a delayed responder. So I just thought that's odd. And I had the safety glasses, I had worship music, but I thought, that's odd. I didn't know this chainsaw threw sparks. And then, right as I thought that, I smelled propane. I was like whoa! I cut through part of a propane line.

SHEILA: Oh my gosh!

LISA: I thought after all the emergency crews came and everything and told me I almost blew us up I thought, you know I probably need to harness some of this energy over being discombobulated by just the whole world changed. I sensed God saying, Lisa, you think this season is tumultuous but if you'll look back over your life, you'll see that every valley you've walked through I was sufficient. I thought, I'm just going to go back and kind of mine the chapters of my life, the seasons that we were laughing so hard we had tears streaming down our face or grieving so deeply I ran out of tears. I thought, I just want to go back through my story and God's story, because I believe it is redemptive from cover to cover. And it ended up being a devotional book.

I told my publisher that I always feel like sometimes devotional books are written by the saints who have it altogether. I feel like I've got to get my stuff together before I even start reading the devotional. I said I want people to feel safe before they open it up. So my only non-negotiable was that crazy subtitle because I want the woman who says "Goodness gracious! How could a perfect God actually delight in a woman like me that has so many mistakes in my back story?"

It was much more fun than I expected so we dive pretty deep. Every devotional has scripture but it's fun to live a lot of wonderful times with God, whether it was a high or low.

SHEILA: You know what's interesting, for all the years I've known you, no matter what you're talking about, no matter what you're teaching on, no matter what you're writing, all the strands go back to your passionate belief in the power of the Word of God. I almost felt like this is a safe place for some people who are thinking, I'm not sure where to start.

LISA: Right. I'm not sure how to dive into Habakkuk but maybe I could read a story. I totally agree with you, especially in our culture I feel like scripture is either maligned as a punitive rule book or it's taken as kind of a spiritual smorgasbord; just reach in and get a meme that you can put on social media because it is inspirational.

It's like oh my goodness. It's so much better than that! From beginning to end, God is always, if you get it, if you get the context, he's always restraining evil, he's always restoring our dignity. He is not a mean God, he is not a capricious God, he is a redeemer. And then he is always pointing us toward Jesus. Always!

So I see a lot of people who think the Old Testament--or talked to a lot of people who say the Old Testament is like God is a unbrowed librarian. In the New Testament it is Jesus with barrette girl Hair extensions hugging everybody. If that were true, God would be bipolar. That is not who he is. He is perfectly compassionate, perfectly holy but so accessible all the way through. It's just that we don't usually take the time to get to know

the... remember that VHS-1 story, um show, I don't know if they still have it and I'm not advocating it, but *Behind the Music*? When they tell the stories from behind, why that song was written. I think we don't take the time to go, oh my goodness, this is a real story. It is a supernatural love story. Let me dig in there because it is amazing. It is not boring. It is the antithesis of boring.

SHEILA: Talking about restoring dignity, let me take you to day two.

[LAUGHTER]

So day one, I'm reading day one and I'm like oh this is so beautiful! Real happy people stand up. Happy are the pure in spirit. Then I get to day two.

LISA: You know I couldn't have that story and not put it out there! God would not have let us live that moment if we weren't supposed to share it.

SHEILA: You realize I have the photographs to prove it?

LISA: You've got to tell the story!

SHEILA: No, no! You wrote it. You have to tell this story.

LISA: Okay. You know concise is not my gift so I'll try to make this story because this story could be like a week of shows. If you haven't figured out, I'm pathologically biased about Sheila. I think she is just... she truly is one of the most amazing people I've ever met in my whole life. And you're much classier than I am. It's like one of these things is not like the other one. But we got invited to be, kind of the hostesses at a Christian movie premier. So it wasn't a Hollywood red carpet, it was more strip mall polypropylene kind of an event.

And Barry, at the time, Sheila's husband, had this just claustrophobic little sports car.

And so I was in my usual fluffy season, so I was like double Spanx; you were in some gorgeous, elegant outfit. And we get to the movie premier, and remember, he parked us out at the edge of the parking lot.

SHEILA: He'd got a new car. He didn't want anybody to come near his car! We could have packed a lunch to get to the mall.

LISA: See, I was remembering it even kinder because I love Barry, so I didn't want to castigate Barry in this. So he parks us away from where the event was but I thought it was so we could fluff and get kind of better before we walked up to this exciting...

SHEILA: Polypropylene carpet!

LISA: Yeah! With like 12 people waiting for us. I'm exaggerating. So anyway, Sheila gets out just so elegantly and so smoothly, but Barry parked you right next to a grassy median and it had rained like the last several days. So you didn't know because all you saw was the green grass that it was so muddy. And you were wearing your typical four-inch heels. And she got stuck. It was like she was pinned in the mud like a stork. And you were kind of flailing.

SHEILA: Oh flailing is kind.

LISA: And of course, Barry is not rescuing you, he's taking pictures. And you are like my favorite person and like my big sister and I'm like I'm going to rescue you, doggone it. But I'm packed in the back of this car in Spanx, so it took me like 13 minutes to get out. I think I broke a nail. I finally get out to rescue you, well, I've always have been bigger than you and I also was wearing heels. So when I go to grab you to stabilize you, I get stuck and then we're both wobbly like two sailors on a ship that's going down. And I ended up falling a little bit on top of you. Is it okay if I say what you said?

SHEILA: Oh go for it! Why not?

LISA: You just were so, just were supposed to be there and elegant. Instead, we're writhing in the mud. Sheila's underneath me and I hear this beautiful Scottish lilt, "Help! I'm peeing!" Which I couldn't stop laughing.

SHEILA: We were laughing so hard.

LISA: Just crying laughing. And so then we have to somehow get ourselves up from this just messy heap and pretend like we have it together and walk toward the event. It really was one of the most... I always have so much fun with you.

I think the thing I love about you, I'm obviously a hot mess. You don't look like a hot mess. There's just something about you that's so... I always feel like there is something about you that is so royal--not just Jesus, but you are elegant. But you never ever put up a facade. There is just this honest, I can't make it without Jesus.

SHEILA: Do you remember we never even made it into the movie because we were so muddy. We had to go home.

LISA: We were like the swamp creature! But we tried. You had to do that television show; remember?

SHEILA: I know! I know! And Tony Romo was there. It was awful!

LISA: I just stood behind you and cackled most of the time.

SHEILA: But the fact you included it, I feel so honored.

LISA: I felt like it was very holy. I felt like it was a little bit of a stretch, but I was pretty sure I could get us to scripture.

SHEILA: Okay. So some of the stories are funny but some of them, you could call, there is depth here, Lisa. This is a deep profound book. Day 62 you talk about the holiness of helplessness. Talk to us about that.

LISA: Yeah. One of my favorite living theologians and I know yours too, is Dr. Tim Keller. I was studying the gospel of Mark and you know that story where the dad of the sick kid. Because of my little girl that adores you, you're "Aunt Sheila," but I got to be Missy's mom through the miracle of adoption. Missy was really, really sick when I started the story. And so I identify with a parent who is worried about her child's physical health.

And there is that point where he confesses to Jesus, when he thinks his son is dying, he says, "I believe." In other words, "I know you're the Christ, I know you can help but I'm dying today. I'm afraid I'm going to lose my son. Help me in my unbelief." And I was studying that story and it was especially resonant with me because of some of Missy's health issues and my fear. I want to be so faithful and know that God is always good but I'm so stinking human that sometimes I forget, and I get scared.

And I was reading a Tim Keller commentary on that particular story in Mark's gospel, and he said... and he's such a brilliant theologian and godly man. It kind of surprised me coming from him. But he said that it is helplessness, not holiness that is the first step to accessing intimacy with God. That slayed me. I thought, sometimes I try to come before the Lord with all of my... oh, whatever little... you know, power that I have. *Power* is the wrong word but competence; thinking he'll kind of bless that. And it's like he tells me over and over again you come to me with what you don't have. Come to me with your absolute lack and I will bring vibrancy out of void. So come to me when your heart is in pieces. Bring all of yourself, even the messy scared parts to all of me and I will redeem it.

So I do think, I think just recognizing the fact that we can't save ourselves, can't heal ourselves, can't infuse ourselves with peace when life is hard. I think to bring that to the Lord and confess our neediness, I think that's really critical for us to have a vibrant,

intimate relationship with God.

I was telling a friend the other day. I said, "It's kind of like you've got to peel off your Spanx when you come before Jesus. Don't try to hold your stomach in and act like you have it all together. You just go, "You know me." He knows the places where I've been so foolish and my faith has been so feeble, and yet he still calls me not just daughter but he's like, "I think you hung the moon." His kindness, it just gets bigger; doesn't it? The older I get, the more undone I am by the kindness of God.

SHEILA: It's so beautiful. It's almost like the capacity increases. And it is almost as if suffering makes space for a bigger picture of God.

LISA: I think that, of course, the veil, the salvific veil between us and God was torn when Jesus gave up his life on the cross. So I want to be careful with semantics, but there is still, you know Paul says we see through the glass dimly. So we have a blurry lens, effectively. You take human finitude, and you try to look at the magnitude of God, we can't see him perfectly clearly.

I do think suffering, difficulty, pain, if we bring that to the Lord, I think that blur gets a little more clear. I feel like the times that I've seen God the clearest have been when I'm honest enough to recognize how desperate I am for him. I've gone back to school.

SHEILA: Yeah! Doing your doctorate!

LISA: But just to see Jesus. I believe he has revealed to us through revelation and Holy Spirit, and holy writ, and so I just want to see Jesus bigger. Plus I'm an old mom. Missy's 11, I'm 57, and I think it is one thing for me to say, "Honey, learning is good." It is another thing for her to see me next to her doing my homework.

But I was in a class with this professor has since become, he's the head of my dissertation team so I'll brag on him because I want to pass. But his whole point over and over and

over again, he says, "You have to study the Bible with an understanding that God is always in the process of mitigating evil. He is always in the process of restoring our inherent dignity as his image bearers, he's always in the process of turning us toward the true north of Jesus Christ."

He was talking about a passage in scripture, this was two years ago, it was like my second class at Denver, and he just uncovered this kindness of God in a passage I had understood to be punitive. Like I thought God was kind of angry in that passage. And I was so taken aback, I thought I've been studying the Bible for 40 years and it just gets better. He gets bigger. And class was over, and everybody left. And I just couldn't get out of my chair. I was so overwhelmed that I just began to weep at the kindness of God.

And Dr. Howard had forgotten something. He came back into class and there I sit, this older woman blubbering in his class. He was kind of taken aback. I think he probably thought she needs to be in the counseling track, not studying hermeneutics. And so he was kind of taken aback. But he said, "Are you okay?"

And I just said, "I'm just... I can't believe he's even better than I hoped he'd be."

I feel like that as a believer. I feel like I'm still kind of in the honeymoon season with Jesus. He's better than I ever... And God's word reveals that. We do ourselves such a disservice when we think this is boring. Or we only open it up to be dutiful. Or we use it as a club to knock somebody over the head that we disagree with. Oh it is so much better than that, so much more liberating.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Gosh! Don't you love her! She's amazing. I'm just sitting here thinking how grateful I am for the years I've had here at *LIFE*, almost seven years, and the great privilege of interviewing so many amazing men and women. And also getting to know so

many of you too.

I want to commend this book of Lisa's. Honestly, as we've said, whether you're eight years old or 80, you're going to love this. And for any gift at all, we would love to send that to you because one of the things that we have cared about and I learned on day one, the day I sat down with James and Betty in their home and they invited me to become part of the team, one of the first things they shared was all about Mission Feeding.

I remember as a 16-year-old girl, I gave my life to Christ at 11, but at 16 I was like, Lord, I'm all in. I want to serve you every day for the rest of my life. And I felt the Lord laid three things on my heart. One was evangelism. Second was teaching the Word of God to other women. And the third was caring for the poor. And being here at *LIFE*, I've had that incredible privilege of doing all of those things.

I'll never forget my first Mission Feeding trip to Angola. I'll never forget what it is like when the plane hits down under an African sky in this hot place and you suddenly begin to see why James and Betty care so much about what's happening around the world. And that's because right at this moment, wherever you're sitting, watching this program, and me sitting here in this studio, there are mothers and children right now who are literally starving to death. But the incredibly good news is you and I have the privilege of changing that. Watch this.

On the mission field

ISAK: So we're here in rural Angola and we've been talking to you about the drought that's ravaged this area. Not a one-year drought, not a two-year drought—five years of drought! For five years they've not had enough rainfall to grow a single crop. If you look here, you'll see what's left of this farm is just dry remnants of a crop that used to be.

How has the drought affected your ability to, lack of rain affected your ability to be able

to farm?

Open Captions

>> There is no rain to cultivate and plant corn. We can't harvest anything. I usually close the door early, so the children can't go out and ask the neighbors for food.

ISAK: I'm sorry. I'm sorry, mom! I'm sorry. I'm sorry, mom.

I know that she would provide for her children—give her half a chance. Just give her the rain she needs, and she will cultivate that land. She will work herself as hard as she has to work to provide for those children. "But it never rains anymore" is what she said. Five years of drought.

I hope you feel like I do. And if you do, then I'm asking you to please say yes, I'm going to be a part of bringing food and changing the situation for this mother, for her child, so she doesn't have to close the door early anymore before they go to bed hungry.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: It's just heartbreaking to watch that mother just literally break down. These women, so many of these women that I have met over the years have to be so strong for their children. They don't want to break down but every now and again it is just too much. Every now and again, they get to the place where it is like—I can't imagine having to close your house door to keep your children in because they're starving, and you don't want them going trying to ask somebody else for food. You want to keep them safe, but you know that everybody else in your village is suffering too.

And as a mom, that is just heartbreaking to me. And that's why we're bringing this to you right now. This is a wonderful time to get year-end gifts in and I can't think of any better

thing to do with that than to be able to reach out in Jesus' name and provide help and hope and life to these moms and their children.

It's a very doable thing. It seems overwhelming because our commitment at LIFE is to feed 350,000 children this year and we're coming close to the end of the year. But here's how we break it down to make it doable for each one of us. \$30—\$30 will provide food for three children, not for a week, but for three months. \$50 provides food for five children. If you've been able to—maybe God's blessed your business and you're able to give \$1,000, do you know that will provide 100 children with food for three months? That's like an entire village.

In so many of these villages that I've been in, I've never met one mother who hadn't lost at least one child to malnutrition—sometimes two—sometimes three—sometimes four. And one mother I met has buried five children. It is unthinkable! And you and I can change that. That's the great thing.

I'm so grateful to Isak and our people on the ground who are there day by day reaching out and finding out where the greatest need is. I can't imagine what it is like—five years of drought. I remember the last time I was in Angola with our team. You just try to dig through the ground, and it is hard and there is nothing there, it's giving nothing.

But you and I can change that. We can set up Mission Feeding in those villages. And we provide, I love to call it hope in a bowl—life in a bowl. You'll often see in our footage these little bowls, and we produce—factories that we have in Africa produce the food that children in those areas of the world need. I've been able to sit there and ladle out the food for these children. It is a good nutritious meal. It literally is life in a bowl.

Join us. It is almost the end of the year. Would you give an end-of-the-year gift? Even if you've given before, let's change the situation there so that these beautiful mothers don't have to sit there and weep into their hands. Please, go to your phone now. Give the very best gift you can. Go online. Let's make a difference because of Jesus.

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: Across the continent of Africa, children are suffering and facing severe malnutrition. Lack of rainfall and severe drought has led to one of the deadliest food crises in 40 years.

With food reserves gone and many areas experiencing severe famine, we urgently need to replenish supplies to keep feeding the 350,000 children who are counting on us. Through *LIFE's* Mission Feeding outreach, your gift of love can be an answer to prayer for a hurting and hungry child in their time of need.

Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 to help feed and care for three, five, or ten children for three full months. With your gift of any amount, we'll send you the *LIFE Planner* bound in soft-touch leather. This planner will help you in your daily walk with space for you to record your appointments, goals, inspirational notes, and prayers.

With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the scripture pen set. Perfect companions to the *LIFE* planner, these beautiful wooden pens are inscribed with scripture references to keep your heart focused on God's plans for you.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request our inspiring bronze sculpture, *Let the Children Come*. This beautiful bronze is a reminder to care for children around the world in both word and deed.

Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of video

On the mission field

ISAK: We're seeing crisis at the level of malnutrition and a near-starvation perspective here in Angola like I've never seen before! We cannot bring an end to this crisis. We cannot save the lives we need to save without you. We need you to open your hearts today.

So please, I'm asking you to dial that number on your screen or to get online and give the very best gift you can give today—to give the gift of life by giving the gift of food.

End of video**In the studio**

SHEILA: Thanks so much for staying with me. If the lines are busy, please keep calling. Let's make a difference. And for any gift at all, we will send you Lisa's book. And I can't help myself, I'm going to repeat it one more time, *LIFE*: An obsessively grateful, undone by Jesus, genuinely happy, and not faking it through the hard stuff kind of 100-day devotional. For any gift at all, ask for Lisa's book and it will be our joy to send it to you.

So from all of us here at *LIFE*, thank you for all you do. Keep calling. God bless you.