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Week five: WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Toni Collier

In the studio

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh, here with Randy Robison. And I'm excited about our guest today, Randy. Every now and again you meet somebody on the road and immediately you just think, oh my gosh! I love this woman. I love her heart. I love her journey. I love everything about her. And then she writes a book, *Brave Enough to Be Broken*. Toni Collier, it's so good to have you here.

TONI: I'm so glad to be here, Sheila! And we did meet on the road, and I was like I love this woman. I will follow her to the ends of the earth.

SHEILA: And here we are!

TONI: And here we are.

RANDY: The ends of the earth right here.

[Laughter]

SHEILA: That's a great title, *Brave Enough to Be Broken*. That's an intriguing title. Why did you call the book that?

TONI: Well, first and foremost I think that people will read it and they're like, what is she even talking about? This is an oxymoron. What do you mean like I've got to be brave to be broken? But I just believe it doesn't take a whole lot of courage to pretend to be

perfect. I don't think it takes a lot of courage to brag about the things that you have and your followers and comments. But it does take a whole bunch of bravery to stare at someone and say, I've been through this. I've got this addiction, I've got this temptation and I'm ready to claw my way out and find hope. And so I was like well, I'm just going to say it and hopefully, people will be brave enough to pick up the book about brokenness and pain and all the things and it will be fine.

RANDY: For those who maybe didn't see you last time you were here or don't know your story, give them a little bit so they know where you're coming from.

TONI: Whoo! Man! So I grew up in a blended family. My mom got incredibly sick when I was younger, had a massive stroke, lost feeling in her legs and her left side, and I started taking care of her really young. So I became a caregiver. And what that means for a child is that you're protecting everyone else, and no one is protecting you.

And so I had sexual manipulation and abuse in my childhood from family members; lost my virginity at 13. Got on drugs and alcohol to numb all that pain. I ended up in an abusive marriage and an abusive church and it was just abuse and toxicity and trauma throughout my story. And at 24 I had this moment where I was in a valley and I was like Lord, I know that you won't probably ever use me again for anything great but if you can just at least give me hope that things will get better it would be great. And he one-upped me for sure! And was like, I'll do you one even better, I'll redeem your life and I'll restore the places that you thought were lost forever. So here I am!

SHEILA: The first time I heard you, you spoke on this which I think of you every time I read this quote, "Broken crayons still color." Where did that come from?

TONI: It came from that valley moment. It came from God saying, not only will I redeem your story, but I want to use you for great things. I want to do what I did for the Apostle Paul who was a Christian bully and became the greatest Christian advocate. I mean I'm not only in the business of restoring you, but I will do great things with your

brokenness.

And so I remember my daughter, giving her a little 64 box of crayons and letting her live her life. And then she ruined them all! She robbed them of their dignity and took all their little clothes off. It was a whole thing. But I remember she was still coloring with all these broken crayons. And what a beautiful sight to see with a little girl who for us as adults was like this is so much destruction, it's like a mess. And she is like, oh, no! Like so much awe and wonder. Look at what I can do still with even the most broken things. And I just believe God is looking at us saying the same thing.

RANDY: There are some people right now, you went through your sort of laundry list of things to do. We could spend a whole program on any one of those, right? There are some people that are in one of those places or someplace similar and they hear you saying this message of hope but they can't see it. What do they need to know that you discovered?

TONI: Well, the first thing that I discovered was that it is okay to be hopeless. Like for me all my life I was pretending because I believed the lie that you can't feel bad things. You can't be hopeless. You've just got to push through. People used to say, "I know you're going through all that but you're so strong." And I think I needed permission for someone to say it's okay to be weak, it is okay to be in pain, it is okay to feel hopeless. Because I just believe that hope arises from the dirt. We don't need a whole bunch of hope, we don't need a whole bunch of grit when everything is going great. But when things get hard, I think that people need to know that they can be in that place, in the sorrowful place, as David writes in Psalm 6:6. You can flood your bed with tears and soak your couch and God will be right there in that valley. And he'll also be there to carry you out when it is time.

SHEILA: That's one of the things I learned when I spent a month in a psych hospital. And out of that, I wrote a book called *It's Okay Not to Be Okay*. Because I felt all my life that I had to be perfect so God wouldn't stop loving me.

I want to ask you how you dealt with the battle of shame. Because so often the enemy wants to make us feel that that's who we are.

TONI: Well, first and foremost, I have read your book and I love it very much. And a lot of -- I mean I've reached out, I've been like hey, what do you think about this, Sheila? Like, help me with the book, all the things because this message of shame and guilt that you so eloquently unpack is just the truth, and I think it needs to last for the ages. It is this idea that the enemy will try to use shame to confuse us. He is not that creative, but he did a work when he got shame into the story. Because he is the author of confusion, and he will make us believe that shame and guilt are the same things.

But we know that guilt says I've done something bad, and shame says I am bad. It is an identity attacker. And so I think that we've just got to figure out the difference. We've got to be okay with saying, man, I've been through some pain. We live in a fallen and broken world. I've caused some pain, maybe, as well. And that's okay. I'm guilty of that. But I don't have to live in shame. There is real freedom in us naming it. And when we name it, we can heal from it. So forget the shame.

RANDY: There's also an interesting thing in the Old Testament, especially, about brokenness. Because there is brokenness before the Lord over our own sin, and that's a good one because God can work with that. But there is also a brokenness that is spoken of that is to ruin where you are no good anymore.

So when you talk about brokenness and someone who may feel broken right now, how do you not let it become a brokenness to ruin but one of redemption?

TONI: Yeah, well, I think we just have to remember what we were made for. We were made for Eden. We were made for goodness. Like God had a divine plan. He wanted us to be bopping around having a good old time, and sin came into our world. I think we just have to remember it's our most powerful thing. When we start to remember what God

made us for, we know that we can go through all the brokenness in the world, there can be destruction all around us but there is a divine purpose in the way God has created us and what he's called us to. And while here on this earth we won't be brought into full completion until we're in heaven with our Father, we can start to live a life of sanctification and reach towards that, and not let it define us, not let it become our identity. I've been through some things but darn, I'm still worthy of good things. I'm still worthy of a hope-filled life. And so I think we just have to remember who we are and what we're made for.

SHEILA: It is interesting. I was talking to one of my son's friends. My son's about to turn 27 and we were talking about church. And his thing was, "No way. I believe that probably there is a God but I have been so wounded by the church."

You address that in this book in a way that is really, really helpful. Talk to us about that.

TONI: Man, here's the truth. I only think I have the authority to talk about this because I've done it wrong. I've been through some things. When it comes to church hurt, I think we have unfortunately made it like this blanket statement. It's like any time you ever got offended or called out, whether it was toxic, not, traumatic or not, in the church environment, next to the church, in the parking lot, it is church hurt. Okay? And I just think we have to do our best to kind of start breaking it down, to be okay with the complex, messy, middle-of-life that we sometimes end up with.

And the first thing that I did when I addressed my own church hurt was, I asked myself, what did I bring into this situation? And the truth is I was worshipping a pastor, not a savior. I had put someone on a pedestal that he just could not uphold. And when his brokenness came about, his imperfections came about, his controlling nature came about just for this specific pastor, I was devastated. But it was so closely tethered to my faith that my faith was devastated and my belief in God was devastated. I think when it comes to church hurt, we have to do our best not to apply what happened to us in the earthly realms to our heavenly relationship with a Father who is perfect. We have to ask

ourselves, what are we bringing into this situation?

And then, for me at least, I just -- I don't know, I believe the best in humanity. I believe you can have a fallen, broken, horrific experience here and God can redeem it through another experience just like it. And I found a healthy church. I found a healthy church community. I started over again. I didn't give up on humanity. We are God's plan A so we can't give up on it.

RANDY: Tell me what you think, but I think sometimes we can be too quick to label someone or a relationship toxic. We're like, oh, I didn't like what they said. It's toxic! But yet there are -- there are relationships that aren't, and experts will tell you what you look for is the pattern. A pattern of if every time you pick it up and drink it, it's poisonous, it makes you sick, well, then that's toxic; but just some of the one-offs that we can be hypersensitive to.

How do you break through sort of some of that relational mess and difficulty to get to the healthy community? Because every community has people that will offend us, or we disagree with. It is hard at times.

TONI: I love what you said, this idea of it's about patterns. If we were defined by one bad moment in our lives, oh, my goodness! Let me tell you, I've got a couple of them. If I were defined by some of my singular bad moments, bad choices, then I'd be devastated. I think there is just power in self-awareness when it comes to passing judgment on others.

What about you? What would you want? What kind of grace would you want to be served? Would you want a God of one chance, or would you want a God of infinite chances that welcomes you back in -- that's not leaving the room ever, ever, ever? I think we have to extend the same grace that we just want. It's as easy as being self-aware of that.

SHEILA: I love the fact that you said that when you were looking at your situation you

asked yourself, what did I bring into this? Honestly, Toni, that's huge in itself. Because for so many people, it is so easy to say it is your problem, and it is your fault.

But I've discovered in my own life, I never feel more fully human and alive than when I repent. I've discovered the joy, the absolute gift of repentance. And when you believe that God is sovereign, that he is on the throne, that everything -- you don't understand why everything happened but he's promised to bring good, it almost lets you let everybody else off the hook. You know?

TONI: Absolutely. What I love so much again is that we do serve a God of infinite chances. This God that's just pursuing us, wanting us to live lives in just natural pursuit of him over and over and over again. Every day I wake up now and John Eldredge does this thing. He just says, Jesus, I give everyone and everything to you. Take over my life. Take control of my life because you're better at it.

The truth is, I don't want a limited God. I want a God that's bigger than all my mess. And the only way for me to identify that is if I'm bringing it to him every day. If I can keep going through that cycle and saying, I'm imperfect, I'm imperfect. Let me remind myself, don't get too comfortable here, sweet girl. You ain't as cute as you think! Okay? All right? You're not. You're imperfect.

But what that does is it makes God bigger for me when I recognize my own brokenness.

SHEILA: I love that.

RANDY: That's a big thing. That's not always easy and let's -- let's take a very difficult circumstance in your life that you brought up. You're abused by an extended family member. And we could talk about forgiveness and talk about what that looks like and I'd like to know, but where does trusting God's justice over our own sense of justice come into play? Because I think that's a sticky point for a lot of people.

TONI: Yeah, 100%. Well, I think here's the difference between forgiveness and then there is reconciliation. There is this tension between that. There are some people that I have been able to reconcile in my life. My own father was verbally abusive growing up. I remember sitting down with him and saying, "Hey, you just can't talk to me like that anymore. I'm putting some boundaries up." And my dad leaning in and saying, "I want a good relationship with you. I want to reconcile this." It's beautiful!

There are unfortunately other people in my life that won't respect those boundaries, and that will not want to restore and redeem our relationship. Reconciliation isn't possible with them. But forgiveness, oh, my gosh! I think it is the one thing that we can do that can bring about justice on the earth for ourselves.

But the truth is God is the judge. He is the ruler. He is just working things out in ways that we don't know how. But what we can control is our ability to forgive and our ability to reconcile if we can trust that person again.

RANDY: What does that forgiveness look like very specifically for you?

TONI: It starts and ends with me. Like it's -- again, the biggest part of my healing journey has been looking inward. Even after all the things that have been done to me, all the pain that is so real, there is something about saying, yes, I was a victim to that but I am no longer a victim in my mind, in my heart, in my soul because Christ has claimed the victory for me.

So in my life, I've just been able to look inward and say, okay, what did I bring to this situation? What kind of peace do I want? Do I want peace that is accompanied with bitterness? That's angry all the time? Uh-uh, nope! I want a peace that's hopeful. I want peace that's at rest. I want the Prince of Peace, my Sar Shalom. And it's been easier to extend forgiveness from that place, to reach out to that person, and to audibly say, "Hey, I forgive you. Even if you and I don't have the same relationship or even a new one, I forgive you because I want peace, I want real peace."

SHEILA: What do you think about counseling? Because I remember someone coming up to me and asking if I was in counseling. And I said, "Well, yeah." And they said, "Well, where's your faith?" I wanted to say naughty words but didn't.

TONI: Listen! In my culture, African American culture, it's a really big stigma. I remember telling my parents, "Hey guys, I'm getting ready to go to counseling."

My mom called me, and she was like, "You got bipolar? What's going on? What is happening?"

I'm like, "No, I mean I don't know. Maybe I do. I'm not sure but I want to go. I want to go, and I want to be mentally and emotionally stable."

Here's what had me go, my daughter. There were some things in my parenting that felt not of God. It wasn't peace-filled, it wasn't patient, I just, there was something there. Well, I asked myself the question, what is there? Why am I so short-tempered with my daughter? Why am I so embarrassed when she does one simple little thing?

Well, I grew up with a father who was never proud and always felt like he was embarrassed by us, of what we'd done. Those things from my childhood just leaked right into my adulthood because they went unchecked. They had no tending. And I think we tend to our physical health by going to the doctor and doing what we need to do for it. We tend to our spiritual health by making sure we're in a church community, that we're reading our Word, and that we're close to God. When it comes to our mental and emotional health, I think we need to tend to it. And we're not the experts; we need a trusted voice to help us tend to those parts so that we can live, I don't know, the life that I think God wants for us which is holy but also whole.

SHEILA: That's great! I love that.

RANDY: Sure. I'm curious because you sit down here and from the moment we came on the air people can see this is a woman who is full of life and full of joy. What's the payoff been for doing the hard work of striving after wholeness?

TONI: Let me say this. I think the payoff is about 20 percent. The cost is about 80 percent. The cost of having to look in your past and saying, oh, my gosh, that happened to me! I wasn't protected, darkness entered my story. Sometimes I felt like man, I'm not even worthy enough to be protected from a sexual predator. Like what happened here? There is a cost to healing. Healing is not linear, and it is extremely painful to go back and look at those things, to start to feel the trauma come into your body because you're finally acknowledging it.

The payoff however is hope. On my healing journey, one of the greatest things that I ever received from it, I get emotional even thinking about this, was hope, the belief that it could actually get better. That life could be peaceful. That I could have a marriage with a man who didn't yell and scream and rip doors off the hinges and punch holes in the walls. That I could tend to my daughter and her needs in a kind and patient way. Something that I didn't see in my past. The hope that things could get better, there is nothing like it. I sleep a little better at night too, I think. Yeah!

SHEILA: The last time I saw you, you were great with child.

TONI: Great is a good word.

[Laughter]

Thank you, Sheila.

SHEILA: How is that little boy coming along?

TONI: Oh, my gosh! Now I just, I'm crying when I -- it's been beautiful. He represents

redemption in more ways than one. I mean my son represents one that I've got a healthy thriving marriage, a father who is involved, one of the things that just made me cry in the middle of Target, unfortunately, was that I was able to buy diapers for my son. And with my daughter, I went to a parenting community center. I did these classes. They would give us these like little tickets and we could go shopping for the things that we needed. And I just prayed and prayed that we would have enough diapers to last us.

And the fact that I could just go into the Target aisle and pick up a box, like if I wanted to. It just, I can't even believe it. I can just buy more diapers. It is those little things, it's just gratitude but it is remembering, it is going back and remembering where I've been.

RANDY: That is the hope. Hope is powerful.

SHEILA: I know you're going to want to read this book. It is called *Brave Enough to Be Broken*. I'm going to tell you in a minute how you can get your own copy.

But first of all, we want you to see some people who are living in a place where life is very broken. Access to something that would be life-giving is denied and the very thing that should bring life brings death. But you and I, we get to make a difference. Watch this.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: The water source for this village is visibly unclean. You can clearly see the debris, scum, and wildlife that contaminate it. But it is the unseen parasites in the water that pose the greatest threat. One that took the lives of two of Julienne's children.

Open Captions

>> When my first child died, my tummy, feet, and cheeks were very bloated. I too was in so much pain. I was pregnant and worried that I might not be able to give birth. My second child died six months later.

ANNOUNCER: Experience has taught Julienne to walk in fear knowing she is unable to protect her children from the danger.

Open Captions

>> I know my children died from this unclean water. Anytime one of my kids gets sick, I am afraid. They all drink the same water. I fear they will die as well.

ANNOUNCER: Unclean water does not have to be the end of the story for Julienne or her children. It doesn't have to be the end of the story for anyone.

Open Captions

>> I'm pleading for someone to give us clean water so that our children might live.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: You know, as a mom when I look into Julienne's eyes, and I see that pain, I can't imagine what it is like to bury a child because of something that we just take for granted, the ability to give your child clean water. And she's already lost two children. And the thought that the children that she has left are drinking from the same water source is -- I can't imagine how you lay your head down at night knowing that you wake up again the next day with the same choices.

And the thing that I began to understand the more I went to some of these places is how hard these women work. They get up at 4:00 in the morning and they walk and walk and walk to the only source of water but it's usually one of those hand-dug wells, maybe about six feet down, and the water is filthy! I remember the first time I saw them bring a bucket up and I looked at it and I was like, I wouldn't let my dog drink that water! But that was all they had.

But I've also gone to a village where you see this beautiful sight of a water well, and it will say "Given from partners of *LIFE Outreach International*." And I watch the children pump the water and they're the way children should be, laughing, being children.

The situation at the moment is drastic in so many of the nations we're working in. We're working in 20 nations and Randy, they've been asking us, "Please help us!" And they're not asking for everything, they're just asking for clean water.

RANDY: Absolutely! Interestingly, you mentioned them digging maybe six feet down. There is only so much you can do with your hands or with tools, and I had to look this up, you can go check it out online if you want, but most wells are several hundred feet down wherever you are in the world. That's how far down you have to drill to get to really clean water. It takes some pretty heavy-duty machinery in some very remote areas to get in there and provide a well that will serve villages, the surrounding villages. They'll come, it becomes a hub, sort of a community point; it is a beautiful thing to see by the way. That's why we say the average cost for a well is \$4,800.

Some of you could give a well. Many of you though could give water to a few people. This is how it looks. Your gift of \$48 today will provide ten people with water for an average of 70 years. That's about how long the average well will last because it is not just drilling into the earth, it is doing the casing and providing the pump and all the things that will last that long. That's why we say Water for LIFE. It lasts most people their entire lifetime. A gift of \$144 today will help give water for life to 30 people.

But you know, as we meet their physical needs, we also give them something far more than that, we give them hope for a future. We get them past the point of worrying about living through another day so they can think about tomorrow. Would reach out and give someone water? And also give them hope in the name of Jesus? I pray you're going online or going to the phone right now. We can do this, but we can only do it with your help.

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**

SHEILA: So this is what a miracle looks like! And love made this miracle possible. For

those of you who gave for wells, here it is! And these are the kind of looks you should see on little ones' faces where they're having fun and they're drinking fresh clean water.

You know what? Maybe I'll have some of this. Yep, I'll drink this water! Perfect! But you know what? The need is great. We've been to so many villages that are literally begging for a well. So will you help us because this is what love is all about? Children are healthy, having fun, splashing in the water, and having a wonderful time. If you help make this possible, thank you so much. Let's do it again and again and again!

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Thank you so much for watching that. And if the lines are busy, please keep calling. If we all do our part, we can change the world for so many people. And with any gift at all say, I would like Toni's book, *Brave Enough to Be Broken*; how to embrace your pain and discover hope and healing. This is a great book, my friend. Love it!

RANDY: I know Sheila is very excited to have you back, Toni but I enjoyed you as well. So thank you for being here. And thank all of you for watching. We'll see you next time here on *Life Today*.

SHEILA: Bye!