

11/23/16
Week 48: Mission feeding
Sheila Walsh
Max Lucado

Sheila: Hello! I'm Sheila Walsh and welcome to Wednesdays in the Word. Knowing that I was filming today, it was interesting to me. I work going through the Bible, the whole Bible every year. But the passage for today was from one of my favorite passages in Isaiah and I just wanted to read you a couple of verses. It's from Isaiah chapter nine and it says this: The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; for those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. For unto us a child is born, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

I just thought it was so interesting because as you know Wednesdays in the Word is usually just me and you. We thought, wouldn't it be kind of fun just this one time during this holiday week to have a guest? And I thought, now if we're going to have a guest, who are you going to have? If you're going to have a guest, you better just go for the top.

So today I want you to please welcome my guest and my friend, Max Lucado.

Max: Thank you, Sheila. It's a great honor. I thought you were going to say since we're going to have a guest we might as well start low, keep the bar low.

Sheila: Just one of the reasons we love you! But this book, Max, *Because of Bethlehem Love is Born, Hope is Here*. I know a little bit of the back story. I know you're a huge Christmas fan; isn't that true?

Max: I love Christmas! I'm one of these folks, I never complain when the lights go up in October and it doesn't bother me when Wal-Mart starts selling trees in early November. I get excited. I like the Christmas movies. I love Christmas music. I just play it over and over. And of course, I love Christmas food!

[Laughter]

But to me the highlight of Christmas is when you're in a shopping mall or you're walking through a department store and you hear "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" or "Silent Night," these great classic Christmas hymns that have embedded within them the gospel. You just sense

that the word is being sown and people are being, even if they're not conscious of it, they're being taught the meaning of Christmas.

So it's that undertone of hope that comes through. I know we get all busy and I'm sure we could slow it all down but at least there's the possibility that somebody is going to hear a Christmas message and walk away a different person.

Sheila: You're a very prolific writer. You write for us, you write for children. What was the Genesis for you of writing this book?

Max: Thanks for asking; that's a great question. As you know I've been a pastor for 28 years and I have noticed that there is a sensitivity and an openness to Christmas messages. And there's a reason that Christmas Eve services are usually packed and that advent services are very popular. That is I think people want to hear the story of Bethlehem. They really do. They want to hear what -- they want somebody to answer the question, what's the big deal about the baby? What's the big deal about the baby in the manger?

So I've had this idea for some years and this happened to be the time to do it of creating a book that would just speak into that conversation in a very, hopefully winsome way with a lot of Christmas stories, maybe some funny stories but also unpack some key Bible verses. So I thought, because of Bethlehem, how is the world different? That's why we called it "Because of Bethlehem."

Sheila: A lot of people find Christmas a very hard season. I remember last Christmas getting so many notes from people on my Facebook page saying that they actually find Christmas the hardest season of all. Why do you think that is? And how do you think this book will address that?

Max: You're absolutely right. Years ago, I'm going to date myself now but there is an old Merle Haggard song, "If We Make It Through December." It was a great country and western song. His point was that what's bad is worse in December. Pain hurts more. Bills feel heavier. Separation feels more painful. So what's bad just gets worse in December. It's because we look around and everybody seems so happy. Or everybody seems to have it all together. Or they're seeing somebody with their child reminds us of a vacant crib. It's just everything gets amplified.

But there is a way that we can take the message of Christmas and it can be applied like a balm on our soul, on the wounded parts of our souls. The big message of Christmas is God understands. You talk about a painful world; he was born into a painful world and understands exactly what we go through because he's been through it. That's a huge part of the Christmas message.

So let this Christmas, if it is a hard one, and I can relate, just a few years ago my daughter suffered a miscarriage and we found ourselves just a few days before Christmas in an emergency room. I remember thinking, of all the places you don't want to be at Christmas it's an -- I don't care how much garland they put up an emergency room is still an emergency room. So I get that. But let this Christmas, let the message come through and hear Jesus say, "I understand what you're going through and I know how hard it is but I came into the world in painful times and I can speak to you during yours too."

Sheila: You have an interesting phrase in the book where you talk about seeing God's face in Jesus. Talk about that; would you?

Max: Well, because of Bethlehem we know what God looks like. And in the book we talk about and as a mom you will relate to this, just the excitement that a mother must feel to finally see that baby's face. I know we dads get excited but multiply that by nine months.

Sheila: Ten months, actually -- ten!

Max: And all of that pain and Lamaze classes, multiply it many, many times and the look on a mom's face when she looks in the face of her child. And it's as if she is saying, "Okay, now finally, I know what you look like."

Well, what was it like for Mary who knew she had never known a man, who knew that child was a miracle? Who knew she was carrying God himself? When she looked into the face of Jesus and she saw, I don't know, the little rose bud cheeks, tiny lips and small nose, now this is what God looks like.

It's the most profound moment of the incarnation because God really became flesh. He became so small that he could be delivered just as any baby would be delivered and small enough that a weary young Mary could cup her hands all the way around his face and say, "God would become this. This is what God looks like."

What does he look like? He looks like love. He looks like hope. He looks like understanding and sympathy. It's a turning point moment in history when Mary looked into the face of God.

Sheila: There is so many interesting ingredients in your book, Max, of things I've never thought about before. You would think, there is nothing new about the Christmas story but you talk about Christmas trees, how they tie into our adoption. Talk about that because that's amazing!

Max: That's another fun tradition. Now I've got to confess, we've gone the fake route.

Sheila: Boo!

Max: I know! And quite honestly, I had to give in on this one.

Sheila: It gets messy, doesn't it?

Max: It does. But forever we bought an honest-to-goodness Christmas tree and went through the whole process. I think it had to do with when our kids finally left the house, Denalyn said we don't have to do that anymore. But I love the smell and the sap in carrying the tree and tying it on the car -- all of that.

Sheila: You can actually get spray now. You can just spray it on your fake tree. Yeah! You can even get spray sap.

Max: Spray sap?

Sheila: Yes!

Max: Does it create the smell?

Sheila: It creates the smell. We live in a wonderful world, people! But you take it so much further.

Max: You think about all the things that go into purchasing a tree. You pick it, you select it -- I'll say that -- you select it, you purchase it, you carry it home. And as a preacher, always looking for a good three-point sermon, I can remember some years ago realizing, there is my Christmas Eve sermon. What you did with this tree God has done with you. He has selected you, he purchased you, and he's carrying you home.

Sheila: But that's profound, Max!

Max: It's really the gospel; isn't it? That all of us are selected by God. That he has determined our gender, our personality, and then he said, "Now I want you for my kingdom, for the kingdom that I'm creating and I purchased you." You don't expect the guy in the striped tent to pay for the tree. We have to purchase it ourselves. So we do. We pay for it. Well, God paid for us. We've all been bought with a price. And he's taking us home.

Every person needs to be reminded that this world is not how it was intended to be and this world always will be. We're being taken home. Don't we need that reminder? This has been a hard year full of political topsy turviness, and terrorist attacks, and just violence and fear and conflict. Whoo! I think we need Christmas. We need that reminder.

Sheila: I think this may be the one year we won't complain when they start playing Christmas music too early and we start watching *The Dog Who Saved Christmas*, *The Hamster Who Loved Christmas* -- all those good movies.

I actually wanted you to talk a little to that because one of the things that I found really discouraging this year is the way that we as the church have torn each other apart on social media in a time when, I know that an election is an important thing. I know it is important that believers vote but we have stooped to a new low, in my opinion, in our divisiveness. And I think how do we regain our integrity of the bearers of good news for everyone?

Max: If anybody should be at peace, even in the midst of political turmoil, it should be those who trust more in the one who occupies the throne than the one who occupies the White House. In fact, *The Story of Bethlehem* you talked about a time of political unrest. Rome was occupying Israel. Herod was a jerk, a selfish... he was a murderer -- he was a murderer! So the reason that Mary and Joseph were not home was because the government forced them to go register and that all had to do with paying taxes. Anything you could complain about, they had the right to complain about.

Yet in the midst of that chaotic world Christ was born. I think if we Christians, if we can just let that truth sink in, that of course, we want a government that is running smoothly. Of course we want everything to be perfect but that's not going to happen until the new kingdom; until then though we can be at peace. We can be at peace because if Bethlehem tells us anything it says "out of chaos God creates calm." He brought the Prince of Peace.

So maybe if we could just take a deep breath, realize that the most powerful influence is prayer, not politics, and just focus on the occupied throne more than occupation of anything else, we'd feel better.

Sheila: How does Christmas begin what Easter celebrates?

Max: That's the thing we have to keep reminding ourselves of. As much as we love Christmas, had there been no Easter we would not be talking about Christmas. The reason that the cradle matters is because the cross was occupied. And the reason the cross was occupied was because the crown was given to Christ. So that's how it all progresses. We love Bethlehem. But Bethlehem only began this march, this wonderful journey that Jesus took of redemption.

But remember the name Jesus traces its ancestry back to a name that means God saves -- God saves! So when Joseph and Mary were told the name that they were to give their son, there was significance and symbolism there. That Jesus came to save us -- save us! And not just save us as the Angel said from our taxes or from grumpy neighbors or from boring preachers but he came to save us from our sins. That's the goal of God is to save us from our sins. We have this sin nature within us and consequently, we have led imperfect lives yet the kingdom is going to be comprised of perfect people in a perfect place. So God sent his son to lead a perfect life but to die a death that only sinners would die so that we sinners would receive his perfection.

So really, what the cradle began was culminated on the cross and celebrated in the resurrection.

Sheila: Do you think it is possible, Max for us to maintain the wonder of Christmas all year long?

Max: I do. It is not easy. The distractions are so many. I've felt distracted even this week and I'm traveling around talking about Christmas.

[Laughter]

I think the reason is the devil. There is a real devil in the world and he lives to steal and to kill and to destroy. He wants us to worship him. And ever since he was cast out of the throne room because he wanted God's worship, ever since then he's demanded that somebody worship him.

So since he knows he'll never receive our ultimate worship he wants to take our joy, he wants to take our attention away from God. So we just be aware of him. We glance at the devil but we gaze at God and we stay focused on Christ. I think that wonder can be stirred.

But let's not -- we can't beat ourselves up. We're going to ebb and flow in our emotions. Some days we're going to feel on cloud nine, some days we'll feel at the very bottom but God's hold on us is secure. That's the gospel. It is not our hold on him but his hold on us that matters and his hold is secure.

Sheila: You talk also in the book about what we value and how our view of what is valuable is very different from God's. You talk about that in the book. Talk about that; what is it? We place a lot of value in even when it comes to Christmas people get into debt because they think they have to give big gifts and they have to do this and they have to do everything bigger. Christmas speaks a different message.

Max: It does. Yeah, and also have big parties and have nice new clothing to wear. Again, I don't beat -- it's not worth it to get beat up on that, but just don't get lost in that. Don't get lost in that. What God values is every human being.

Here's a challenge. Somebody gave this to me and I'm going to pass it on. And that is as you are receiving this Christmas what God has done for you, turn and do for others exactly what God has done for you. So you make a list of all the things that God has done for us through Christmas. Well, he's been sympathetic; sympathetic enough to enter our world. What if I did the same? What I was sympathetic enough with my neighbor down the street to make an effort to enter his world, to try to understand him or her? Or go across town to people of a different ethnic background, to enter their world, to be sympathetic, to do everything I could to understand it.

You think about Jesus. He was on the earth as far as we know, for three decades before he ever preached a sermon. Our tendency is to walk in the door preaching a sermon. But he understood the world even though he already did. But he wanted to make sure we knew he understood what it was like. He entered our world. So maybe that is a good assignment this Christmas. Try to be to others what God has been to you.

Sheila: One of the ways we can do that is by reaching out and helping those who have so little. I'm about to tell you about that. But here's what I want you to know. For any gift that you send in today to help us feed children in Africa we're going to send you Max's book, *Because of Bethlehem Love is Born, Hope is Here*. It's a great Christmas gift. You should really buy ten of them and send them out to different people who just need to know that there is a little hope.

But let me show you the difference that you can make when you reach out in Jesus' name. Watch this.

On the mission field

Sheila: We've met a lot of moms on our trip to Angola. I have to tell you, Mariana's story has touched me so profoundly.

Open Captions:

>> I have lost two of my children. They both died because of hunger. There was nothing I could do to save them. I have nothing. My heart aches when I have to put my children to bed hungry.

Sheila: She said that when she goes to bed at night she just lies there. She said, honestly, she wishes she could just give up because she feels such despair. But she said, "I can't give up because I've still got three children who need me." But when she only has a little bit of food she makes sure she gives it to all three of her children, and many nights this mom goes to bed with nothing. Nothing in her stomach and just a prayer on her lips, "Lord, please send me some help."

Open Captions:

>> I am very worried about my children because I know their bodies are not healthy. I know they're not getting enough food.

Sheila: Maybe you think, well, how can we change her life? It is really easy -- through mission feeding. Can you imagine the burden that it will take off of this mom knowing her kids get one good meal every single day? It's not a lot to ask.

End of clip

In the studio

James: No, it's not. It's not a lot to ask. And we are the answer to her heart cry. I would like to hold her. Sheila, when you were with them I could tell, it affects you like it does me and Betty, you just want to hold them. It's kind of like you want to hold them forever. God does and he can. But he uses us to start the process of healing. 400,000 little children like that, already, our missionaries have located in crisis settings. If they don't get stronger because we don't get to them early enough they end up in what we call "malnutrition settings" that your love also pays for, and that's where they go to try to stop death that is right there at the door.

Betty, I can see the concern that Sheila shared and the concern that mother has. She has already lost a couple of kids and she is trying to take care of the others. We really are the answer. Let me tell you. We've got a lot of people watching us who just care about others. This has been an election year and a lot of our donors have tried to support good candidates in the local level all the way to the top so they try to have the best people possible and the best principles supported. But they've given money. I'm going to tell you something, we felt it. And I found myself saying, "God, if we don't get a miracle..." We've got 400,000 kids the missionaries have located that really need help, many of them are dying. We can turn it around. Love will turn it around immediately because that's what we do.

You know what God did in answer to that heart cry? I mean I've been asking God. Some of our friends said, we got a \$400,000 grant, several came together and said, "We'll match \$400,000." You give and your gift will be doubled. And for \$30, \$50, or \$100 we can feed three, five, or ten children for the next months. Well, now that will be doubled -- it will double to six and ten. If you give, let's say \$100, it will take care of so many children, it's doubled immediately and it will just keep going. It's like a gift that keeps giving. You make it once, it's doubled, and then it keeps giving for the next months -- ultimately years -- it's life.

Would you right now be a part of the miracle that mother is crying out for? Betty, I've asked God, please touch the heart of every person watching us to do something to be an answer to the heart cry that we've just heard.

Betty: I believe you will. To understand that your gift is going to reach out so much further than what you thought it might. There are so many more mothers like this precious mom that her heart is hurting. She is going without food herself so that she can give what little morsels she has of life to her children. And there's so many more that need our help. So please join with us. Let's feed the little children, the children that God loves so much.

James: I'm believing that many of you will do that and see your gift doubled. But also, we're going to feed in the schools when they get healthy enough, we want to keep them going to school, their little minds be bright. And \$1400 will take care of a school for three months -- a whole school! I'm praying many of you will do that and it will be doubled, it will get two schools.

So if you can make that special gift, we do have some gifts to send you to say thank you that is going to be a beautiful gift. One of them is a children's Bible that's illustrated. It's absolutely beautiful for your children or your grandchildren. And Lisa Bevere's book, absolutely fabulous! I'm telling you, you're going to be inspired. What you're doing in love ought to be one of the greatest inspirations you'll ever experience.

Go to LifeToday.org online, take your bankcard, use it like a check. Or dial the number; use your bankcard like a check. If you want to write a check, make it to LIFE but would you please call us and tell us what you're mailing? Because the missionaries will be waiting to hear from us; are we going to be able to reach the goals? I want to tell them "yes" because you helped. Thank you for doing it.

Begin video clip

Announcer: In remote and impoverished villages of Africa children are suffering, desperately in need of life saving food, facing death by starvation.

LIFE's mission feeding program is there, ready now to feed and care for children in crisis areas of Angola, Mozambique, and Sudan. With all of our previous reserves gone, and Angola facing a record food shortage due to crop failure, we need to immediately replenish our funding and supplies for our feeding programs.

As an answered prayer, a group of *LIFE's* friends have set a \$400,000 matching gift challenge for mission feeding! This means your gift today could have a double impact! \$30 for three children will be doubled to help feed six children! \$50 to help five children will be doubled to save ten children! And \$100 for ten children will be doubled to help feed 20 children! And don't forget, your \$1400 gift to sponsor a school will now be doubled to feed children in two schools!

With your gift of any amount, we'll send you *Without Rival* by author Lisa Bevere. With your double impact gift of \$100 or more please request *The Complete Illustrated Children's Bible*. Finally, please consider a gift of \$1000, which will now be doubled to help feed 200 children and you may request our beautiful Majesty bronze sculpture.

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

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: I don't know if you get used to seeing pieces like that. I don't! Sometimes we think, well, that's just how life is over there. Until you take a trip there and you sit beside a woman like Mariana, she is exactly like you and me. She is a mom who loves her children and all she wants is to be able to give her children one meal a day. I can't imagine what it is like to bury two children simply because they died of starvation.

We're in the middle of a holiday season where all we do is we overindulge; and it is not like we're trying to put some kind of guilt trip on each other. I pray you have the best holiday season you've ever had but don't you think it would be so much greater if we know as well as enjoying the beautiful gifts that God has given us that we reach out and answer the prayer of a mom like that? And it is so doable!

Do you know for \$30 you can feed three children? That literally means that for \$30 you would feed all of her family. For \$50 you would feed five children. For \$100 you would feed ten. If

you think about it, for most of us, \$30, you might miss going to see a movie but you know it's doable. You're going to go on but it literally is life-changing for a mom like that.

You see little clips that we can show you but we got to spend the whole day and that mom gets on her knees every night and prays, "Lord Jesus, will you send somebody please to help us?"

We have this amazing thing happening at the moment. We have some friends, some partners of the ministry and they've said, "Listen. For every gift that is sent in, we will double it up to \$400,000" which simply means if you send in \$30 to feed three children it will be doubled. You'll actually, for your \$30, six children will be fed. So if you send in \$50 it means that ten children will be fed; for \$100, 20 children! It's not a lot to ask.

During this time when so often we cannot beat ourselves up because we've just gone overboard. What a gift that Christ has given us to be able to be his hands and feet to moms that maybe we'll never meet down here but when we finally get home it will be kind of cool for a mom to come up and say, "You don't maybe know me but that time when you gave that money, it came to my family and my children are all alive and we lived our lives because you cared."

So please, would you do something now? Would you give the best gift you can? You can call the number on your screen. You can go to LifeToday.org and give your best gift knowing that it will make a world of difference. These moms that I got to spend time with, they're praying every night. And here's an amazing opportunity, you and I get to be the answer to their prayers.

Begin video clip

Announcer: In remote and impoverished villages of Africa children are suffering, desperately in need of life saving food, facing death by starvation.

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

End of clip

On the mission field

Betty: This little baby cries because he doesn't know me. I'm a stranger to him. That's natural for a child to do that when they don't know who it is. But we hear the tears of a lot of them and the crying because they haven't had anything to eat, because they're starving. We want to wipe those tears away for those children. Would you please join with us?

We're here now in a place where the children have been fed and they're dancing, they're laughing, they're playing like children should. And yet, crying like that, there are so many that are starving. Some of them are too weak to cry because they don't have the energy anymore. Please help us. Join with us now.

We love you. We care about you and we want you to care about these babies that we're showing you today that need our help.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much! The great news is do you know that for \$1400 we can sponsor an entire school that because some of our amazing friends that's going to be doubled. So your gift of \$1400 to sponsor a school is actually going to sponsor two schools and change the life of so many children.

Thank you so much, Max! Thank you for being with us. Please join me again next Wednesday when it will probably be just be me and you. God bless you. See you next time.