

12/28/16
Week 1: Mission Feeding
Wednesdays in the Word
Sheila Walsh -- My Story

Sheila: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to Wednesdays in the Word. I grew up on the west coast of Scotland. If you've ever been to Scotland one of the first things you notice as your plane is beginning to descend either in Glasgow or in Edinburgh is all around you just see field after field of these beautiful, very white sheep -- so white because it is always raining.

One of the things I loved about growing up in that community was I loved when the spring lambs were born. There's something so beautiful about watching these little baby lambs be born. Initially, they're so fragile but within moments they're bouncing across the field.

But something happens in that community and shepherds have not been able to work out why or have they been able to change it and it is not just in Scotland. You can do a little research, it happens all around the world. Every now and then a mother will give birth to a lamb and immediately reject it. Now the shepherd can try to move that lamb back beside the mother but the mother will simply kick the lamb away. If the shepherd doesn't intervene then that little lamb will die, not of hunger but actually of a broken spirit.

So what the shepherd will do, they're called "bummer lambs" -- called just "little bummer lambs." What the shepherd will do is he will take that lamb into his home and he'll care for it. He'll keep it warm by the fire and feed it with a bottle. And at some point during each day, he will hold that little one close to his heart so that the lamb can hear a heartbeat. Now once the lamb is strong and able to kind of stand on its own feet the shepherd will reintroduce the lamb to the flock.

This is the part that I loved watching as a child. In the morning the shepherd will come out and stand at the edge of the field and he'll call out, "Sheep sheep sheep!" And the very first ones to run to him are the bummer lambs because they know his voice.

I want to tell you a story about how that really became very real to me. Two of my favorite verses in the book of Romans; I love the book of Romans, chapter eight in particular. You can't get much better than beginning with "no condemnation" and ending with "no separation." That's a pretty great deal. But these two verses in particular, Romans 8:38 and 39 say this: And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love; neither death nor life, neither

angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow, not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love; no power in the sky above or the earth below. Indeed nothing -- nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I've known that verse since I was a little girl but I want to tell you today how God moved me from knowing the words to understanding the profound truth.

Have you ever said "yes" to something just because you're in a good mood? Somebody asks you to do something and you're like, "Yeah, sure!" And then later you think why on earth did I say yes to that? Well, that's what happened to me. I had never been a speaker in my life. I worked in television. I was a musician. But before I ever stepped on the platform at Women of Faith, which I was part of the team there for 20 years, I had never spoken in public before -- apart from one time when a friend of mine talked me into it.

I was a student at Fuller Seminary and Marlene called one day and she said, "Sheila, what are you doing on Saturday?"

I said, "Nothing. Do you want to do something?"

She said, "No. Actually I want you to do something for me."

I said, "Yeah sure, if I can."

She said, "Would you drive to Palm Springs and would you speak to a group of women in a country club there?"

I said, "No."

She said, "I really need you to."

I said, "Marlene, it is not that I'm not willing to help you, I don't know how to do that. Anyway, think about it. You know almost every woman who is a speaker in this nation. Ask one of them."

This is what Marlene said. Now remember, this is my best friend. She said, "I've asked them all. You're the bottom of the barrel."

So I said I would go. Well, I woke up on that Saturday morning thinking why on earth did I say I would do this? Most of my clothes were jeans and T-shirts, I was a student. But I had this

one Sunday outfit so I put it on and I'm driving the two hours from where I lived to Palm Springs. And I felt obliged to apologize to the Lord on the way there because I was pretty convinced because he wouldn't be speaking to me on the way back.

So I basically I just said, "Lord, I have no idea what I'm going to do there. I have no idea what I'm going to say."

Well, I arrived and it was worse than I thought. It was just a beautiful country club, perfectly manicured lawns and they showed me in and took me to the top table; a thousand women sitting around these lovely tables with crystal and china, all in their little beautiful chenille suits and perfect makeup. And they sat me beside the most stunningly beautiful woman I'd ever seen in my life. You know 5' 10", maybe size half -- I don't know!

But when I got up to speak I literally stepped to the podium and prayed one of those, Lord, what-do-I-do prayers? And in my spirit I heard my Father say, "Sheila, just tell the truth."

So I said, "Okay." I said, "Good afternoon, ladies. My name is Sheila Walsh and seven weeks ago I was released from a psychiatric hospital."

Yeah, that will quiet a crowd quickly. And I just basically told them my story. I told them what it is like to grow up in a Christian home in Scotland, which is very rare; less than 2% of our population even go to church. So to grow up in a home with a mom and dad who didn't just go to church but who really, really loved Jesus was a gift.

But when I was five years old my father had a massive brain injury and he went from being this loving, wonderful dad to this very confused, angry and ultimately violent stranger. And the last day that I ever saw my father alive was turning in time to see him about to bring his cane down on my skull. I don't know whether I pulled it from him or whether I pushed him but all I remember is he hit the ground hard and just laid there roaring like an animal.

Well, my mom had been in the kitchen and when she heard what was happening she came in and she got my brother and sister and I and she locked us in a room while she dialed 911. Now we lived in a small town, it was a small fishing town. I don't think it would have been more than five minutes before help arrived but it felt like an eternity. And eventually it took four men to carry my father out of the house that day.

He was 34 years old and he was taken to what was called Ayrshire Lunatic Asylum -- a horrible place. Because he had become violent he was placed in the maximum security ward and all the other men in there were men in their 70s and 80s who had completely lost touch with reality.

So my mom asked, "Would it be possible to move Frank to a unit with some younger men?"

Well, they did but it was a less secure unit and that very first night my father escaped. They searched for him all through the night, and eventually they found him in the morning. He had drowned himself in the river and he was caught in the salmon nets.

In those days in Scotland, you didn't take children to funerals or to a graveside. All I knew is that my mom came home in a black dress with a black hat on and took every picture of my father off the walls and off the tables and she placed them carefully in a little suitcase which she locked and pushed under her bed and we never mentioned him again.

I think we know so much more nowadays about how to help children process grief. I think she thought if Sheila wants to talk she'll talk. She had no way of knowing the conversation that was going on inside my head because there was no one left on this earth who could answer the one question I needed an answer to, and that was, what did my dad see in me that made him hate me so much in the end?

Children, if you have kids you'll know this; children are the best collectors of information. They miss nothing but they are the poorest interpreters of that information. I grew up with what I call a profound sense of shame.

Here's how I differentiate between shame and guilt. I think guilt tells me I've done something wrong. But shame -- shame tells you, you are something wrong. What do you do with that? You find a place to hide. You find some kind of mask to make it possible to go on. Sometimes people will use drugs or alcohol. Sometimes people will use medication or even spending money. They think if I look better on the outside I might feel better on the inside. I found the perfect place to hide -- Christian ministry. Think about it. Who is going to come up to me and say, "Put up that Bible down or we're going to have an intervention!" Not likely. But God's the only one who knows whether we're serving out of pain or passion for him. So I went to seminary. I eventually came to America and I ended up as the co-host of the 700 Club with Dr. Pat Robertson.

Here's the truth. Inside I was still the same scared little girl who wouldn't let anybody get close to her in case you saw what my dad saw.

Do you know it's possible to be very well known and profoundly lonely? That's the amazing thing about the mercy of God. Jesus said, "I've come to give you life," not just survival, not just getting through one more day. "I've come to give you life." But sometimes his rescue plan is something we would never sign up for.

At almost the same age as my dad I'm interviewing a guest one day and I ask my first question and they don't answer the question. In fact, they turn the tables and say, "You know, Sheila you sit here every day asking us how we're doing. How are you doing?"

She meant it kindly but I wasn't ready for it. I didn't have time to pull up that wall and I did something I hadn't done in years and I started to cry and I couldn't stop. The TV guys, the camera guys were embarrassed, the studio audience was embarrassed. Eventually they threw us to a commercial break and I walked off the set and I locked myself in my dressing room, and as far as I was concerned my life was over.

If you've spent your whole life trying to prove to people that you've got it all together and you end up in a place that says you've definitely fallen apart, what do you do? So I called a friend of mine, a guy called Dr. Henry Cloud. And I said, "Henry, I think I'm losing my mind."

He said, "No, you're not but you need some help. And you need it quickly."

So I went from literally being the co-host of the 700 Club in the morning and by that evening I was in the locked ward of a psychiatric hospital. But you know what I've discovered about the relentless mercy and love of God? Sometimes he'll take you to a prison to set you free.

I remember the first day the psychiatrist asked me my name. I thought oh, this is a trick question. I remember my name. So I said, "Sheila Walsh."

He said, "No, no, Sheila. I know your name, I said, 'Who are you?'"

I said, "I'm the co-host of the 700 Club."

He said, "No, I didn't ask you what you do. I asked, 'Who are you?'"

I said, "I have no idea."

He said, "I know that and that's why you're here."

And honestly, that began one of the most profound journeys of my life to discover that my worth is not based on anything I bring to the table, it is based on God's love for me.

I remember after I'd been there three weeks I was given a pass and they said, "You can go to a movie or you can go to a mall. We'll send a young nurse with you."

I said, "No, I'd just like to go to church. I don't care which denomination. If it's a Bible-believing church, I'll go there."

I remember I sat in the very back row and I felt so lost. But the preacher, I don't remember his whole sermon but at the end he said, "Some of you in here feel as if you're dead inside. You can almost hear them begin to heap the ashes on top of your casket." He said, "But I want you to know something. Jesus is here. And you don't even have to get yourself out of that hole, you just have to call on his name and he will reach in and grab hold of you and pull you free."

I had no idea what the protocol of that church was. But I ran to the front and I lay face down in front of the cross. What kept coming back to me were the words of a hymn my grandmother used to sing to me when I was just a little girl. The hymn is "Rock of Ages" with these two lines: Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.

And I finally got it. I am not the good news. Jesus is! I find the story of the bummer lamb very applicable. It is interesting when the shepherd goes out in the field in the morning and he calls, "Sheep sheep sheep!" The bummer lambs run to him because they know his voice. Does the shepherd love the bummer lambs more? No. They just actually dare to believe it. I will be a bummer lamb until the day I see Jesus face to face but it is not the bad news, it is the good news.

Do you remember what Jesus said? We find it in John's gospel; John chapter 10. It is how he identifies himself. Here's what he says: "I tell you the truth. Anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold rather than going through the gate must surely be a thief or a robber. But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. After he has gathered his own flock he walks ahead of them and they follow him because they know his voice."

I don't know what your story is. I don't know what kind of mask you've had to hide behind but let me tell you this one thing. I finished my story that day at Palm Springs and I finally had the courage to actually look at one or two of these beautiful perfect people and I saw tears flowing through perfect makeup and I thought, I guess you can't Botox pain. The interesting thing was, I said at the very end, "I'm not in a hurry. If anybody wants to talk, I'll be here."

The very first person to come up to me was the beautiful blonde that I was sitting beside. She took off her gold cuffs and showed me where she had slit her wrists. I thought, some of our masks just cost more but they're serving the same purpose.

I don't know what your story is. I don't know what you feel you have to hide. I don't know what you're using to hide behind but I want you to know that God loves you exactly as you are right now. Some days you're tempted to think, well, I used to love the Lord. I used to be very involved in church but there's some things in my life that aren't good and once I get my act cleaned up then I'll be right back. No! Don't do that. Come as you are. Let God clean you up. You don't have to clean your own act up. You're loved just the way you are.

I would never have signed up for any kind of journey through mental illness but honestly today, I'm grateful. I'll tell you why. Because it means I can look in the eyes of somebody else who is suffering and say, "Me too."

Don't be ashamed of your story. Don't hide who you are. Don't wait until you get it all together. Recognize the beauty of being a bummer lamb. Does God love his bummer lambs like me more than he loves everybody else? Nope. We just actually dare to believe it. When you come clean, when you're transparent and at that moment when you feel the most broken you've ever felt, you feel a smile of the Father on you, it's the best thing on earth. His love for us is not based on what we got right. It's based on his son Jesus who has made every single one of us right.

That's why for the rest of my life I'm committed to three things: To telling others the good news about Jesus, to help build my brothers and sisters up in the faith, and to care for the poor. See that's the thing. When you've been ransomed, when you've been taken in by the shepherd and held close enough to hear his heartbeat, you want that for every single person in the world.

That's why it is such a privilege to work here at *LIFE Today* because not only do we get to share our stories and interview guests and things with you, we get to take you places that you've never been and show you what a difference you can make in Jesus' name. Watch this.

On the mission field

Announcer: I am a mother's worst nightmare. I thrive on the pain of children. I do not discriminate and I show no mercy.

Sheila: You look into the eyes of a child who is seriously malnourished and there is just nothing. It is like somebody just turned the light off.

Announcer: You won't see me coming but you will soon hear me in your children's cries.

[Children crying]

My touch brings bloated stomachs, thinning hair that changes color, painful skin disorders and tiny bodies so thin and frail they appear as living skeletons.

Sheila: To see this little helpless one with the skin literally peeling off his arms and his legs was such a horrifying sight.

Announcer: I am slow but sure. My name is malnutrition and my legacy is death.

Sheila: I heard someone on the news one day make a comment about the devastating deaths of children in some countries in Africa. And yet the reporter suggested that perhaps the mothers there were "more accustomed to that because it is very much a part of their life." [Sighing] I've seen with my own eyes what I knew in my gut -- no mother will ever become accustomed to burying a child.

The thing that really has blown me away the most, all of this is reversible.

[Children Laughing]

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: I can't even begin to put into words the impact that that last trip to Africa had on me. I think it was the stark contrast of seeing, of walking into a malnutrition clinic where literally these little ones have to make such an effort to breathe, just to take a breath. And to stand beside these moms and think -- there was one woman I'm standing beside and I'm thinking she is about the same age as my sister. I didn't feel like... originally I'm from Scotland now I'm American. It wasn't like that; it was like we're sisters. I could tell she was praying over her child. I thought, this is not a hopeless situation. We can do something now.

Our prayer is that these children never end up in the malnutrition clinic because the next day I got to go to the village and to see the difference it makes with one bowl of food a day. I talked to one of the doctors there and I said, "Do you ever just want to give up?"

He said, "No. Because of the kind of people that you have, the people that are giving, the people I'll probably never meet on this earth, because of what they continue to do," he said, "I see miracles happen every day."

I said, "What do you mean miracles?"

He said, "Well, the first bowl of food, the whole process begins to reverse. That death cycle begins to change."

So I want you to help us do this. This is our last week of Mission Feeding and for \$30 you feed three children for three months, \$50 feeds five, \$100 ten. But we have these amazing people who have come up with a matching gift. So if you give \$30, instead of feeding three you're going to feed six children. Instead of feeding five for \$50, you're going to feed ten children. It's a \$400,000 matching gift from some of our friends because they have seen with their own eyes the difference it makes.

Jesus said, "When you do these things for the least of these you do it for me."

Every bowl of food given in Jesus' name literally changes things from death to life. We had the privilege as a team of praying over some of these little ones and praying that they would grow up strong to become godly men and women in their cultures to change their nation for Christ. But we need your help and we can do it. I'm going back soon and I want to keep telling them, "Hey, this is not stopping."

So please, would you go to your phone now? Dial that number on the screen, give the best gift you possibly can or you can go online to LifeToday.org and give there. But we can all do something. And when we all do something you put quite a difference in the life of a child. Would you go to your phones now? Would you join with me? We can change this world in Jesus' name.

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.

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

End of clip

On the mission field

James: Beautiful children! They're lining up because of love. Not just food -- they're lining up because of love. I just thank God for his love. And then I thank God for the love that you expressed that is the love of God for all these children. Betty is here right now and she is serving up the soup.

Betty: We've seen lots of lines over in states, kids lined up for games, kids lined up for parks, kids lined up to go to a movie. But these lines are different. These kids are lined up for food for life.

Won't you join with us? These are the kind of lines that really count. These children need our help. They need someone to make a good choice for them and that's for life. Please join with us and help us with the mission feeding. Thank you so much!

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much! This is the last week of the year and I know you're sitting on the sofa and you feel like you've eaten too much. Let's reverse that and make a difference in the lives of these children.

Do you know that \$1400 sponsors an entire school for three months but because of the matching gift you'll actually be able to feed two schools and hopefully I can go over there, get some food, bring it back and let you see the difference it's made.

We really, really appreciate you. Thank you for your help. Go to your phone if you haven't do that. Go online. Give the best gift you possibly can and we will see what a little help does in the hands of the Master. It changes everything! Thank you so much for being us. See you next time on Wednesdays in the Word.

Sheila: Don't forget we're getting really close to that time when you want to get your year-end gift in. Don't miss out on that fabulous deduction! We need all those we can get. So please give your best gift now.