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Week 3: Water for Life
Wednesdays in the Word
Sheila Walsh: Woman at the Well

Sheila: Hello! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. One of my favorite authors is a guy called A.W. Tozer. I don't know if you're familiar with his work. If not, you might want to check it out. He wrote some brilliant things.

But there's one quote of his that I've meditated on so many times. Here's what it is; see what you think. He said: "What comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you." "What comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you."

Sit with that for a minute. When you think about God, how do you think God feels about you? Do you think God's happy with you? Do you think God's excited about you? Or do you maybe think God's a little disappointed in you or not quite as fond of you as he might be of some of his other children? I think a woman we meet in scripture probably felt exactly that.

One of the things that blow me away about the Word of God is that if you just hold up the Bible and from the first word to the end, to the maps, it is all about the love of God. But every now and again you get to hone in on a story that helps you to see the lengths that Jesus would go to reach one woman with a bad reputation in a small town. Nothing good about that. And in John chapter four we meet this woman and she is called "the Samaritan woman." We never know her name. Although early church fathers tell us that her name was Veronica and she went on to become very involved in the church. But in scripture, we just know her as "the Samaritan woman" or "the woman at the well."

I wanted to give you a little background first of all on why it was so controversial that Jesus spent time with this woman. Not long after Solomon ruled, not long after Solomon died, Israel, the 12 tribes split. There were ten tribes up in the north and their capital was Samaria, and there were two tribes in the south and their capital was Jerusalem. Now both in turn were led into captivity but one of them remained true to the faith. The two tribes in the south with the capital in Jerusalem remained absolutely pure. Their big thing was you do not intermarry with other nations. But the ten tribes in the north did intermarry and so they became very looked down on, their capital was Samaria.

It's interesting even today, in very orthodox Jewish families, if a son or a daughter marries outside of the faith, you know they hold a funeral service for that child? It is very, very important to Jewish people to keep the purity of the line.

So the fact that Jesus was going to go out of his way to meet a Samaritan, but not only that, a woman. Even if she had been a Jewish woman, the law of the day was that no teacher should even acknowledge her even if it was your wife. You're walking through town with some of the other rabbis and teachers and you see your wife out with her friends; you're not even supposed to make eye contact and smile. You're supposed to just keep going. The most religious of all were actually, laughingly, I guess, called "the bleeding Pharisees" because if they saw a woman coming toward them they would put their head down and walk into walls so they were literally covered -- I mean it was ridiculous -- but very, very serious.

Then comes Jesus and he changes everything. So let me read you just a little bit of the story and we'll just see how radical God's love really is. John 4:4 and it says he had to go through Samaria on the way.

Here's what's interesting about that. If you actually look at the Greek word there what it means was he was compelled -- compelled by the spirit to meet with one woman who was so broken. Christ was listening to his Father and he was compelled to go through Samaria.

He came to a field, (Jacob's well was there) and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well around noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to drink water.

Why was she there at noon? That's the hottest time of the day. All the other women in the village would go early in the morning and gather their water. But we're going to learn from her story that she was a woman who had a reputation. She had been married five times. She's actually living with a guy now who is not her husband. But boy, when she meets guy number seven, when she meets the seventh man, it changes everything.

Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink."

He was alone at the time because the disciples had go into the village to buy some food. The woman was surprised for Jews refused to have anything to do with Samaritans.

She said to Jesus, "You're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan woman; why are you asking me for a drink?"

Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you're speaking to, you would ask me and I would give you living water."

"Sir, you don't have a rope. You don't have a bucket and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob who gave us this very well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?"

Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again but those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again; it becomes a fresh bubbling spring within them giving them eternal life."

We're about to come to quite a turn in the road here in our story.

"Please sir," the woman said, "give me this water and I'll never be thirsty again. And I won't have to come here every day by myself to get water."

Jesus said, "Go and get your husband."

What does she do here? What does she do? Does she admit that she's living with a guy she is not married to?

And can we step out of the page just for a minute? I've heard so many people teach on this passage about what a terrible woman she was, what a low life she was. Can you think of any woman who wants to end up like this? I imagine her -- this is not scripture but I imagine her as a young woman, 15 or 16, they got married very young then and she falls in love with a boy in the village that she just thinks is the best thing that's ever walked this earth and they get married, and she is not able to have children. It is a huge thing in her culture. It's looked on as a curse from God. And all it took was for him to say in front of company, "I divorce you" and she is gone. She is out. He has not responsibility to take care of her at all. No alimony in those days.

So maybe she goes on to another village and she finds some other guy and really likes him but thinks, should I tell him my story? Do I tell him I've been married before? And eventually, she trusts him with it and he said, "Oh, never mind. I love you and we're going to have a great life!" But once again, no children.

By the time she meets Jesus this is a broken woman. She can't even find a man to marry her anymore. The best she's got is a guy who says, "Listen, hey. I'll give you a roof over your head." And that's where she is.

So let's see what she says to Jesus. This is John 4:17: "I don't have a husband," the woman replied.

And Jesus said, "You're right. You don't have a husband. For you've had five husbands and you aren't even married to the man you are living with now. You spoke the truth."

Why did Jesus do that? Why would he do that? I mean if he already knew, was he trying to shame her? Absolutely not. Because here's the deal. Unless we understand that God knows all the bad news about us, the good news really never sinks in because we think wow, if you really knew me!

How many times have you sat in church or in your Bible study group and you looked around and you thought if these people knew my whole story I'd be out of here. Jesus wanted her to know hey, I know your whole story and I'm here to meet with you. The story goes on.

"Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet! So tell me why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place to worship (the two tribes in the south) while we Samaritans claim that it is right here where our ancestors worshipped?"

Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman the time is coming where it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship while we Jews know all about him for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming, indeed it's here now, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way for God is spirit. So those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

I love to be able to do word studies. I don't know if you're into that but I love it. That little word truth there, in Greek it means: With nothing hidden. Wow! True worship is those who worship in spirit with nothing hidden. Maybe you think you're more acceptable to God if you present your best side but here Jesus is saying that's actually not real worship. I want you to show up. I want you to actually be who you are.

A friend of mine asked me one day. She said, "Sheila, how would you feel if you heard that a movie had been made of your life and nothing left out? Not necessarily just the things you've done but even the things you've thought." The things you thought are not actually sin because I didn't actually do it. "How would you feel if that movie was put up on a screen and anyone who wanted could watch it?"

I said, "Not great."

She said, "Here's the truth of the gospel. God has seen your movie and he loves you."

Did you get that? God's seen your movie, the whole thing, director's cut and he loves you. And you know what that kind of love does? Listen to this. She goes running, this woman who has come to the well at noon because she doesn't want to see one more person, she drops her bucket and she runs back to the village and says this, "Come see the man who told me everything I've ever done."

Isn't that interesting? She didn't say, "Come see this guy who is really a prophet and he'll tell you wonderful things about your life." No! She said, "Come see this man who told me everything I've ever done."

She actually becomes the first evangelist in this village. She tells the good news. I don't think we really get the full extent of the good news until we understand that sometimes it's the bad news first. We have to face what's true about our lives. We have to bring who we really are. It might seem a little risky and I understand that. There is wisdom to be found in not just spilling your stuff over everyone. Jesus even talked about that.

He said, "Don't cast your pearls before swine or they might trample them underfoot and turn on you." That's just Christ saying, "Be wise. Don't just share your most intimate stuff with people who will not treat it with respect."

But I really encourage you, if you're not part of a community of faith, I really encourage you to try and find that. I have, in my own life, I've patterned it after the way Jesus lived. You remember that when he started his ministry, he called different people to be around him. But then about a year in he spent a whole night on the mountain alone with his Father praying, and from that place he chose 12 men, we call them his disciples, 12 apostles. But even from that group there were three men that were his closest, remember, in the Garden of Gethsemane. They were the ones he said, "Please come with me. My soul is really in anguish."

I cannot tell you the strength that has been in my life learning what it is to be known. James talks about it. He says, "Confess your sins one to another, pray for each other that you may be healed."

It can be a little risky but I've discovered that the enemy thrives in secrets and lies. See he is an accuser of God's children. I think that's one of the reasons I love the book of Romans so much because Paul makes it very clear, if you're in Christ there is no more condemnation. Remember Romans 8:1: There is therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus.

So if you feel condemned, just know where that is coming from. That's coming from the enemy. If you feel convicted, it's a totally different story. See condemnation pushes us away from God; conviction pulls us closer to the Father's heart.

So in these days that we are living in as we're facing a brand-new year, just remember that the enemy prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. I've watched that happen when I was in Kenya once. The lions looked to see if there anyone at the back of a -- maybe a whole tribe of Impala, and if there is one that kind of gets off by itself, that's when they strike. That's why you and I need one another as the body of Christ.

I would encourage you to find two or three people that you trust. Give it some time and have an accountability so that you're known, so that when you feel weak -- I have that in three friends and when I'm not going good, some days when I feel like I couldn't even call, I'll just text and say, "Would you pray for me?" And immediately, they're right there with me.

Christ, his passionate love for one woman that nobody else in the village wanted anything to do with compelled him to go to Samaria. It's interesting if you look at a map at all, it kind of looks almost like an egg shape but stretched out because right at the bottom you've got Judea, right in the middle you've got Samaria, right at the top you've got Galilee.

Most Jews because they didn't want to go to Samaria, they would actually cross the Jordan, miss Samaria altogether and cross back. If they walked straight it would have taken them three days but they would take six days because they did not want to be in the same company as a Samaritan. Christ said, "No. I'm heading straight through because I'm looking for one woman who thinks that it's all over." Nothing like having a reputation, is there?

I just want to say to you, I don't know what you have done, I don't know what trail of disasters you might have behind you, maybe a string of relationships, maybe you're so broken and you think I cannot come back one more time. I've blown it too many times. I want you to know that's not true. That Christ invites you to come. Come and drink of living water. Come and let him fill you up.

One of the things I love about everything I read about in scripture, I find that we get a very practical application here at *LIFE Today*. We have such a commitment to seeing water wells drilled in Africa because there literally, the people are dying because there is no clean water at all. I think the grace that that woman experienced at the well with Jesus compelled her to immediately share the news with other people. It's kind of how we feel here. We've received such grace ourselves and we want to take that news all around the world to those who need clean water now. Watch this.

On the mission field

Announcer: Saraphina has come as she often does to the church to seek God in her time of trouble. As hard as it may be she continues to hold on to her faith that a miracle will come.

Open Captions:

In all of Gatabo, there is no clean water. We must go to find water in the river. We have no choice. When we drink the water we get parasites. We face many problems because of the water. I lost my husband because of the water two years ago. My heart is black with sorrow over what I have lost. I am full of grief. I know God is the protector of the widow. I know God loves me. I know God gives me life every day. Without God, I cannot live.

All of us in Gatabo share the same fear. Every time we drink the water, we risk a death like my husband's. I fear this will be my children's fate. We continue our prayers for clean water, but we must drink dirty water every day.

Announcer: While Saraphina is full of brokenness she remains full of faith. Her prayers lifted up could be answered today.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Very moving that Saraphina comes to the house of the Lord with her need. I think we should meet her there.

Can you imagine losing your husband, losing a child simply because there is no clean water? I know what those rivers are like. I've watched mothers getting buckets of water with their children and the animals are in the water as well. The water is filthy! It is not just filthy, it is disease-ridden. But it is their only choice. It is all they have.

We have asked -- we have really asked God for this year, "Will you tell us what you want us to accomplish here at *LIFE Today*?" And we've been given this goal to do 188 water wells, to drill those in Africa. We really ask you, will you join us to do that? It is so doable. \$48 will give clean water to 10 people. \$144 -- clean water to 30 people.

But do you know that for \$4800 and some of you can do that. I know some of you can't but \$4800 will actually drill a whole well. And the amazing thing about the technology of these wells now is that it will give water for 70 years! That's why we call it for *Water for Life*

because for the whole life of the village, for the whole extent of 70 years there will be clean water available.

I watched that beautiful sister sitting there in church asking God, reminding God that he is a God who has promised to take care of the widow and to take care of the orphan. I say to you and me, let's be an answer to her prayer. Let's say right now, "Yes, we heard you! And we're going to make sure that one of these 188 wells is going in your village so that you don't have to go to one more funeral service simply because there wasn't enough water."

We can do this, friends! This is not hard. It is very doable. So I ask you now, would you go to your phones? Would you give the best gift you possibly can? Some of you can do \$144 but some of you actually could do a whole well. Wouldn't that be amazing? Knowing that there is a well out there that you provided water for, for a whole village? Whatever you can do, please go to your phones; make the best gift possible. Or go online to LifeToday.org. And if you're sending in a check, will you just call us and let us know, hey, we're doing this, so that we're able to get back to our partners there and say, "Listen. Help is on the way and it is coming to your village and it is coming soon."

I cannot wait to go over there and see the difference it's made. I promise you, we'll bring it all back and will let you know. But we need you to stand with us now and say yes, we will be the answer to Saraphina's prayers; in Jesus' name. Thank you!

Begin video clip

Announcer: Every day children living in extreme poverty are forced to make a dreadful choice, drink filthy polluted water filled with deadly disease or die from thirst. No child should ever be faced with this decision.

Our teams have recently located remote villages in southern Africa where children are dying from contaminated, disease ridden water. The situation is desperate. They need clean disease-free water immediately.

With your gift today you can help drill 188 water wells in remote villages across seven African nations. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five people. A gift of \$48 will help provide for ten. \$72 will provide for 15 people. And \$144 will help provide fresh disease-free water for 30 people for a lifetime!

With your gift we'll send you Sheila Walsh's devotional, 5 Minutes with Jesus, a fresh infusion of joy to help you find perspective in the midst of daily life and experience a deeper connection with God.

With your gift of \$100 or more you'll also receive our No Greater Name canvas, a beautiful artistic expression of our savior's name and a daily reminder of his presence in your life.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well. And you may request our beautiful new hand-painted "Determined Eagle" bronze sculpture.

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

End of clip

On the mission field

James: Just as we're giving water here in Southern Africa, we need to give water like this, a cup of water where there are contaminated water sources that are killing not only children but their entire families. Many children lose a parent because of some intestinal disease from contaminated water. And it may be that you can give a well. You can provide the entire cost or you could say I'll join another person or a couple of other people but I'm going to help.

I'm standing by the answer. I'm standing by the solution, a well I can operate very easily with one hand, any child can do it. You've got clean water coming here. And this is life -- this is life! That's what you're providing when you help us drill water wells and give these simple pumps that any child can work. Thank you for helping!

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: With any gift at all we're going to send you my new book, it is called *5 Minutes with Jesus; A Fresh Infusion of Joy*. Just a few moments each day to kind of get your life off in the right direction. And also for \$1200 or more we will send you this beautiful "Determined Eagle," a reminder that those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. We want to see that happen all across Africa this year. We want to see young children grow up strong, families grow up strong and we can do it together. So please join with us.

Thank you so much for your help. Thank you for caring. Thank you for loving. And we'll look forward to seeing you again next time on *Wednesdays in the Word*. God bless you!