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 Week 14
Wednesdays in the Word
Sheila Walsh: The Shelter of God's Promises: Hope

Sheila: Hello! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. I'm so grateful that you take time to stop by and spend a little time with me.

I had an interesting letter the other day from a gentleman who said, "I get so discouraged when I hear people talk about the bad fathers in our nation, the bad husbands." His letter, he took time to write like a 12-page letter. Honestly, it really touched me because I want to acknowledge what he said to be true. There are so many men out there who are wonderful husbands and good dads.

One of the things I love most about my own husband, Barry was a lot of things that he never learned to do from his dad, like his dad was always worried that something would happen to him because he was an only child so he was never allowed to play football, he was not allowed to do all sorts of things. But I've watched my husband determined to be for our son what he didn't necessarily get himself.

So if you feel sometimes like our culture just kind of slaps at men and tells you all you're doing a terrible job, I just want to say here at *LIFE Today* we're proud of you, all of those who work so hard to be a good husband and a good father and a good son. God misses nothing. So I want to thank you for that.

Today we're going to look again at some of the promises of God. One of the most, to me, most deeply comforting promises is found in Hebrews 13, verses 5-6. Here's what it says:

For God has said I will never fail you, I will never abandon you. So we can say with confidence the Lord is my helper. So I'll have no fear; what can mere people do to me?

I wonder how that promise sits with you. Perhaps there have been moments in your life where it feels as if God has left you. Or you wonder, where are you, Lord when life is hard?

I grew up in a small home in Scotland where we were very aware of the work of overseas missionaries. My mom had a little green plastic bank in the shape of a globe and it sat in the

bureau in our living room and every week, even though she had very little money she would faithfully add a few coins to the bank and when it was full she would send it off to the Scottish Baptist Missionary Society.

Well, our church also had a lost property box and anything that had been left in the church and was unclaimed after six months was sent off to our missionaries working in Africa. Now as a young girl, I saw this as the perfect way to get rid of any of the clothes that my mum bought me that I didn't like. I would just slip them into the lost property box knowing that in just a few short months they would be on their way overseas. It was kind of like tithing I decided but with ugly clothes.

I remember in particular a white fluffy knitted jacket that I didn't like at all. One of my aunts had knitted it for me so my mom said I should be very grateful. I found it hard to muster gratitude so I decided instead to donate the jacket to some poor unsuspecting child in Africa. So I hid it deep in the box. And honestly, I forgot all about it until one of our missionaries home on leave visited our church. Well, she taught for a little while about their work and the people and the work in the villages. And then she showed some slides of the children they were working with. I'll never forget that moment as on screen flashed a photo of a little African girl wearing nothing but my fluffy white jacket with a big "S" on the pocket. Yes, I had a lot of explaining to do that day.

I think as a young woman I had a very romanticized idea about the life of a missionary. I thought it meant lovely stories of reaching people for Christ, always with happy endings. But I discovered that life was hard and often very discouraging for our overseas missionaries. I saw that particularly clearly through the life and writings of English missionary Dr. Helen Roseveare. She wrote a book called *Give Me this Mountain*.

She tells how she set off in the mission field with such high hopes but when she got there she encountered so much resistance to her efforts to train the local people in healthcare and also how men at the mission post failed to give her, because she was a young, single woman doctor any respect. Well, she found that hard.

But it was nothing compared to what she would face one day in 1964. One Saturday afternoon, a truck drove into the village where she lived and two men burst into her home. They destroyed her property and they beat her badly. She actually lost her back teeth to the boot of a rebel soldier. They broke her glasses and she said that honestly, that was the most frightening. When you can see them you can at least put an arm up to take the blow. When you can't see them you're so defenseless.

Well, during the course of that night, Helen was raped by her perpetrators repeatedly. I actually

have her book. Let me read in her words what she actually said about that dark night:

"I don't think I was praying. I was numb with horror, dread, and fear. If I had prayed, I think I would have prayed, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' I felt he had left me. I didn't doubt God -- I never doubted God but I felt from that moment that he had left me to handle the situation by myself."

Have you ever been in a place that is so dark that you feel as if you're all alone? Helen was held captive by rebel forces for five months with other young missionaries. It was a devastating time. But she went on to write how God used her brutal rapes to bring comfort to other single women missionaries. Some of these women feared that since they had lost their purity due to a rape, they might have lost their salvation too. Helen knew otherwise. She knew that even in rape her relationship with God had not been damaged. She had not failed God in any way. For these women who suffered, it was only because of what Helen had been through herself that her words and her comfort held such weight.

One of the most redemptive elements of suffering is the comfort and empathy we're able to share with others when they suffer too. I passionately believe in the truth of all of God's promises but I also know how hard life can be and how difficult it is at times to hold on to those promises to believe. Every day many of us wrestle with these contrary feelings:

I know that Jesus is the way, but I feel lost.

I know he is my healer but right now I'm struggle with sickness.

I know that Christ promises peace but honestly, I'm afraid and I'm anxious.

Our experience with pain and struggle don't diminish the promises of God but we also have to be able to tell the truth about what's real for us right now. That's not doubting your faith, that's fighting for it with a real honest walk with Christ. What would you do right now if you feel as if you've lost hope? How do you access the promise that Christ will never leave you for yourself, never leave you alone? How do you make that promise real to you?

Let's take a look at the context of where we find this promise in the book of Hebrews. We don't know for sure who wrote this letter but it was written to a group of first century Christians who at this point are ready to give up in their faith. If they thought that life would be easy once they placed their hope in Christ they have found out that was far from the truth. They were facing all sorts of persecution and many were tempted to just give up Christianity because it was too hard.

So the writer to the Hebrews is reminding them of who Jesus is and the whole letter is a call to continue in the life of faith. It all builds to this last chapter where our promises: I will never leave you. The author uses a very particular distinct and strange Greek construction of this one sentence because he is trying to make the emphasis so clear. It literally, in the Greek, translates

like this: He says, that is himself, speaking now and he continues to say forever, "I will never leave you." The truth is emphasized over and over: We are not alone -- we are not alone -- you and I, we're not alone.

If ever there was a woman who needed to know that was true it was Mary Magdalene. There's been a lot of misunderstanding as to which Mary, Mary Magdalene was. What we do know is when we first meet her in Luke's gospel is that she had been tormented -- she was a tormented soul. She'd been possessed by seven demons before she met Jesus. We know about her that she came from a noble family and that her hometown was Magdala. That's why she's called Mary Magdalene. It is like Sheila from Dallas, Mary from Magdala. That's on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

We don't know any details of her healing or that face-to-face encounter with Jesus but just that he banished the powers of darkness from her life. She'd been brought from such a dark life into one of light and peace. No wonder -- no wonder her commitment to Christ was so complete. When heaven invades your hell, it wins your heart's allegiance forever.

She's there at the crucifixion. Jesus made seven statements from the cross. Three of them before a strange darkness covered the earth at noon. When this darkness fell there was silence. Christ who had known no sin became sin for us. He was abandoned, alone, as even his father had to turn away.

Of the seven cries from the cross, the fourth was the most passionate and desolate, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Christ is quoting from Psalm 22 as he alone bore the sin of the world. Even in our darkest moments we will never ever know the depth of all that Christ endured as he took upon himself our sin and our shame. Yet, even in this desperate moment it's deeply personal. He cries out, "My God, my God!" And Mary Magdalene, she heard it all. She stayed by him at the cross then followed the body to the burial site.

Let me actually read to you from John what happens because night turned to morning and then before morning broke on that third day Mary hurried back to the tomb to anoint Christ's body. They had been in such a hurry to bury his body before sunset and she wanted to go back, according to custom and anoint his body.

This is what we read in John 20: Early on Sunday morning while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They've taken the Lord's body out of the tomb and we don't know where they've put him."

Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there but he didn't go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and he went inside. He also noted the linen wrappings there while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in and he saw and he believed. For until then they still hadn't understood the scripture that said Jesus must rise from the dead. Then they went home.

Mary didn't. Mary didn't go home. She stayed. Let me read what happened.

Mary was standing outside the tomb crying and as she wept she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels; one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Christ had been laying. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" The angels asked.

"Because they've taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought it was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you've taken him away, tell me where you've put him and I will go and get him."

"Mary," he said.

The minute Jesus spoke her name she knew. How profoundly gracious of Christ that the very first person to see Christ risen from the dead was the one who understood the darkness and the depth of what hell feels like. It could have been to Peter and John. Jesus could have easily chosen to appear to them but he didn't. He gave that gift to a woman who had suffered so much in the way of torment from the enemy and Jesus wanted to say to her, "Mary, you understand the enemy is real. You understand the power of evil. I wanted you to be the first to see that I have conquered evil and death and I'm alive."

I also find the questions that Jesus asked her interesting. He asked her two and I want you and I to think about them in context of our life. Jesus asked her, "Why are you crying?" Think about it. Our faith is based on a crucified and risen Christ. If Mary had walked into the tomb and Jesus' body was there, we would all be crying because everything we'd believed wasn't true. But Jesus was not there. He is risen.

Then he said to her, "Who are you looking for?"

I cannot tell you the number of times I ask myself that question. If I'm in a dark place, if I feel -- if my depression hits me. If I feel like the night is closing in, I hear Jesus say to me, "Sheila, who are you looking for?" And my answer is, "You Lord."

I don't know what you are going through at the moment. I don't know how alone you feel but I want you to remember this promise. Christ has promised there is never going to be a moment in your life when you are alone. When it feels unreal, remember, your emotions do not have brains. Rely on the word of God, not how you are feeling. And then ask yourself, "Who am I looking for? I'm looking for you, Lord." When you know that light and that life, you want to take that to those who are still living in darkness. Watch this.

On the mission field

Announcer: Human trafficking -- it's a multibillion dollar industry where a trafficked girl can in some cases bring in \$200,000 a year to her owner. The crushing reality is almost two girls are trafficked, mostly children for sexual exploitation every minute of the day.

Sheila: On this trip to Southeast Asia, I've seen the worst things I've ever seen in my life; things that no mother ever wants to see: Children trafficked, dragged away from their homes, kept prisoner, trapped.

But today, I've got to see the other side. I've got to see the great news, what happens when God's people move in and say, "No! Not on our watch."

Here we are at this amazing life center. The children are singing, they're laughing, they're the way children should be.

We brought you these stories. We told you what happens in the streets of Southeast Asia with children who are just the most vulnerable of all, kids who walk out into the back of a brothel and cry out into the night sky, "Is there anybody out there who cares for me? If there is a God, can you see me?" Because of our partners here who love God, who are listening to the Holy Spirit, they go in and they answer those cries and they deliver these children, literally from the pit of hell and they bring them to green pastures and they introduce them to a God who not only sees them, a God who knows their name, a God who has a plan for them, a God who has a future.

The joy that I have seen today, next to the darkness that I saw last night, fades for just a moment. But there is a lot more need out there. We're going to do a lot more. Our partners want to expand

this because the thing is we're ministering to these kids, we're saying to them, "You are a child of the King of kings and so we're going to restore all the broken places inside and introduce you to the one person who can transform everything, the one person who can take your darkest night and shine light into that and that is the person of Jesus Christ."

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: That House of Destiny is amazing! To be able to see these children who have been used in the most brutal, horrible way. They try to get these kids addicted to drugs so that the children feel, "There is no place I can go because I need these people."

They do mind games. They'll lock these children in a room with men who are very cruel to them. Then maybe after a week they'll introduce a woman who is supposed to be their mother. She works for the same mob as everybody else does. They make so much money off these innocent ones.

I remember after we went to the House of Destiny and we saw some of these beautiful girls, one of them was playing something for me on her guitar. I asked her, "If I could go home to America and tell people about what's happening here, what would you want them to know?"

Her answer was really short. She just said, "Tell them there's more. Tell them there's more."

We're here to tell them there is so many more and I know that's true. What I've discovered is that it really is relatively easy to change the whole life of one of these children. It's something we can do. We have amazing -- I got to meet the staff that we work with, some of the sharpest people I've ever met in my life. One of them worked for years in law enforcement from the states. He was two years away from retirement and a very attractive financial package until he heard about this need and he left and he's there right now working to rescue these children. We work with good men and women who love God and we want you to help us.

We can only do it with your help. For \$64, with a partner doubling that amount, you can rescue one child. You take three of you, your husband and your wife and two kids to the movie theater you've spent more than that.

I can't unsee what I saw. I can't unhear the cries. I think of the number of children who said, "Before we were rescued, we prayed. We didn't even know if there was a God. We were told there are many, many gods but they don't hear your cries. But we cried out."

But what I was able to tell those children is there is one God and his name is Jesus and he heard your cry. And to him, you are not a number, you are a beautiful daughter of the king of kings. So

I want to go back but I want to tell our partners that we've agreed to join with them this year to see 5,000 children rescued.

Would you help us? \$128 will now double so you can rescue two children; \$1280, instead of rescuing ten children will rescue 20. We can do this. It's not a lot if we all join together.

When our wonderful partners took us back to the airport in Southeast Asia they said, "Please don't forget about us." I said, "I promise you, none of us will forget about you and we're coming back."

But before I go back I want them to know we're going to save children and we're going to do it with your help. Would you go to your phone? Would you go online? Will you give the absolute best gift possible so that a child can be rescued from imprisonment and brought into light?

Begin video clip

Announcer: Innocent children and young people longing to be loved and cared for are being abducted and sold at the hands of violent predators, their spirit and body broken under horrific emotional and physical abuse. Through Mission: Rescue Life you can reach out to save children vulnerable to sex traffickers. You can help rescue those already enslaved and you can help restore their lives and give them a future.

Now a generous opportunity of a \$200,000 matching gift means your gift of \$128 to help rescue a child will be matched to help two children. Your \$64 gift will be matched to help rescue one child from the horrors of human trafficking. And a \$32 rescue gift will be doubled to \$64.

With your gift we will send you James Robison's new book, *Living Amazed*: How divine encounters can change your life. As you read these inspiring stories you'll learn how to live amazed in the presence of God 24 hours a day.

With your gift of \$100 or more you'll receive James's new book, along with the companion Amazed Journal so you can record accounts in your own life where you're amazed at God's goodness.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280 which will now help rescue 20 children and you may request our beautiful new "Determined Eagle" bronze sculpture.

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

End of clip

On the mission field

Kirie: I'm standing in the middle of a slum area where the homes are actually built on top of floating garbage. I've been told that people will come here and offer the mothers hope for their children in the way of a job, giving them some type of work trade so that they can send money here and help their family. But in reality, they're sold into trafficking. They become slaves somewhere.

We're asking you to consider helping us to educate these families so they know how to say no. We're asking you to help us rescue those children that have already been sold into trafficking. Please go to the phone or go online and make the very best gift that you can.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much. It makes the world of difference. I'm teaching today from my book, *The Shelter of God's Promises* and I'd love to send that to you for any gift. Also, James' new book, *Living Amazed*. Because of the generosity of those who have provided a matching gift, when you give \$64 it is doubled and you're able to rescue one child. If we all do something we can change the world. I want that by the next time I go back, to be able to see so many more of these children who are cowering in the darkness, running in the green fields like children should.

So thank you. Please call. If you can't get through, just try again and try again.

So I'm Sheila Walsh. Thanks for being with me and I'll see you next time on *Wednesdays in the Word*.