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Week 17: Mission: Rescue Life
Wednesday in the Word: Sheila Walsh
Ann Voskamp

Sheila: Hello! Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. I'm Sheila Walsh. Today I want us to look at brokenness. One of my favorite Psalms was written by David at a very difficult point in his life. He is running from King Saul. There is nothing worse than a king who has lost the ability to hear the voice of God. And so David is running but he does something that is really humiliating for a man who is anointed to be the future king, he pretends to be insane and eventually he is thrown out of the town.

And at one of the worst moments of David's life this is what he writes. Psalm 34:

I'll praise the Lord at all times. I will constantly speak his praises. I will boast only in the Lord. Let all who are helpless take heart. Come let us tell of the Lord's greatness; let us exalt his name together. In my desperation I prayed and the Lord listened. He saved me from all my troubles.

And then he goes on to say:

The Lord hears his people; when they call to him for help, he rescues them from all their troubles.

And then I know you know this:

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

I'm thrilled today on *Wednesdays in the Word* to actually have a guest, one of my favorite people in the planet and if there is anyone who understands the power of brokenness it is my guest. Would you please welcome Ann Voskamp?

Ann: Oh what a privilege and a joy to be with you.

Sheila: Ann, I remember the very first time that I heard you speak.

Ann: Oh dear!

Sheila: It was at *Women of Faith*. You had come to be a guest at *Women of Faith* and I was standing in the wings for some reason. I can't remember why I wasn't out front. I was listening to you speak and I thought, Lord, I've never heard anything like this before. Because it was very -- you're not one of those in-your-face speakers. It was quiet, it was reflective. And then halfway through your message my husband texted me and he said, "How is it going?" And I said, "I'm on holy ground." That's how it felt, Ann.

So I want to ask you, how did you get to the place in life where you are willing to be openly broken?

Ann: I think the journey I was on -- my first memory, Sheila, is my little sister being killed in front of my mother and I. She was run over by a truck in our farmyard and killed. My growing up years, I was terrified. Death seemed like it was possible around any corner. I couldn't sleep as a little girl. I was terrified, what if I didn't wake up? I had ulcers by the time I was seven. My teen years I was cutting. By the time I was 18-19, I was having panic attacks at university. Anxiety and fear just seemed to hound me.

But if you wear a mask over all of that, the weight of that mask almost kills you. I got to the place where I realized that when I wore a mask, what ultimately got masked was the power of Christ in my life. Like if I could just take the mask off and say, "I'm broken. I have fears. I am wrestling and I'm Jacob clinging to God." I could take that off and the power of Christ could be seen; that in my weakness he got to be all the strength. That I got to say -- I could let go of trying to hold on. And sometimes you're a control freak but the energy, that doesn't take to try to control everything, just to let that go and say, "I am broken and Jesus is taking all the shards of my life and making a mosaic of grace."

Christ got all the glory and I could just lean into him. I didn't have to be perfect. All I needed to do was let him press my wounds into his wounds and by his wounds I am healed. So it really came to a place of grace is weightless. And could I just come to the place and say, "I need to take off all of the masks, all of the pressures I'm feeling to perform, to be perfect, and to step into the weightlessness of his grace. Jesus has finished it all."

Sheila: You know what's interesting though, Ann? I sometimes think, if we could just go away and live in the desert in a cave and be holy -- but you're a mom of how many children?

Ann: Seven kids now. Yes!

Sheila: Seven kids that you homeschool. Your husband is a farmer.

Ann: Yes! It's loud and gritty and dirty and wild and good!

Sheila: So how do you live at that level of vulnerability and brokenness with your family?

Ann: I think that's one of the most important places to live it. I think it is to let the kids know, I'm preaching gospel out loud to myself all of the time. Where I have to go ahead and hold on to this verse and preach it back to myself. I have to go ahead and say, "Wait a second, what can I be grateful in this moment?"

When I'm messing it up and I'm ranting and raving, I've got kids who say, "Mama, what can you be grateful for right now?"

So I think to go ahead and model in front of our kids, because the kids know they don't have it together. So if mom and dad look like they have it together, there's this disconnect between, well, what's wrong with me? But when we can go ahead and model, mama doesn't have it together and I need Jesus desperately, that creates a safe space for everybody to go ahead and bring their brokenness. We know where to take that -- we take it to the cross.

So I think it's good and right for us to be in a posture as parents of lowliness and humility. It is not that we don't get it wrong, it's what are we going to do with it afterwards? And have that kind of attitude with the kids where I apologize to them and I can show them, "Mama messed it up, I'm going back to Jesus."

Sheila: I can imagine some people watching and thinking, honestly, I really don't want to be broken. I want to be whole.

Ann: But -- but if you can in the midst of that brokenness trust that in the broken places God's making abundance. The brokenness makes abundance. Look all through scripture. What do you see? Those broken moments when they're broken, they get multiplied. And multiplication happens in the brokenness. I think everybody wants to get to the place: I want change in my life. I want transformation. You can't get to change or transformation without brokenness.

Our lives are like seeds. If we want change, if we want yield, if we want new life in those places a seed has to be broken to bring forth new life. We say we want to be the fragrance of Christ. Fragrance only comes from things, precious beautiful things that are crushed and broken. So don't be afraid of broken things. Those are places where things can be resurrected. Don't be afraid of broken things. Those are where everything is being redeemed.

So I think if we can, I know culture want us to escape from suffering, escape from brokenness;

numb, do whatever you need to do to hide and bury it. But the degree to which you can embrace brokenness is the degree to which you will experience abundance. The degree to which you can embrace brokenness is the degree to which you can embrace intimacy because everybody is walking around with a broken heart. You lay your broken heart down on the table; the shortest distance between two hearts is sharing that brokenness. We want communion and intimacy. It comes out of being real and vulnerable and transparent with our brokenness.

I just think the metaphor we see through scripture is that Last Supper. We want communion. What does communion look like? Bread being broken; the wine, the grape being crushed into the wine and being passed around. Communion comes out of places where we're willing to be broken and given.

Sheila: Is all brokenness redeemable?

Ann: I believe so. There is bad brokenness; brokenness that is not -- brokenness that hinders us, brokenness that doesn't create flourishing in our lives. But good brokenness breaks bad brokenness. We can say the brokenness of humility, the brokenness of vulnerability, the brokenness of generosity, those are all good brokenness. So we take good brokenness and pour it into places of bad brokenness, the brokenness that doesn't create human flourishing. That begins to break the bad brokenness, and create redemptive stories, resurrection places.

Sheila: *Christianity Today* named you as one of the 50 most influential voices of shaping Christian culture. That's important, Ann. And your blog is one of the top ten. One of my concerns at the moment is I feel like sometimes as Christians in this nation, our voices are getting louder but our compassion is getting less. What do you have to say to that?

Ann: Cry. I think sometimes, quieter voices can carry greater weight. We don't need to raise our voices to be heard. God calls us to be still and know that I am God. Let's go to quiet places and hear what God is saying.

We see all the way through the New Testament, Christ, the character he most models is compassion. And compassion literally means, it means to sort of being hit in the gut. You're actually moved with compassion; it's that bending forward. Compassion, when you break down the word it means co-suffering.

Passion means suffering. If we are going to as a church, as believers, have compassion, we all want that but who would want to step into places where we co-suffer with other people. I really believe that we're called as Christians to be compassionate people that will be like Jesus, like God. God says "I'm Immanuel," God with us. Compassion means you're going to co-suffer with someone; to come alongside them in broken places. I really believe that if we're living like

Immanuel, God with us, with-ness breaks brokenness. When you look around at people around you who are broken and say, "I'm going to walk with you. I'm going to stand with you," and that means that as Christians we have cross-shaped lives, not comfort-shaped lives. So how can I live really shaped like a cross, cruciform and that means stepping into places of suffering and being like Jesus, stretching out my hands and reaching around somebody and pulling them close?

Sheila: Some people struggle with the idea of a loving God and the weight of suffering that there is in the world. What do you say to that?

Ann: I think that's the pounding question as so much as where is a good God in a brokenhearted, suffering world? I think he calls us as the church to be the answer to that suffering; that we get to go ahead and we're to do what God himself does. God himself enters into the suffering. He weeps with us. He cries with us. We look at brokenness and we say, "Why is this happening?"

We may not understand the reasons why but we know that it must be a very good reason because God himself is willing to experience that with us, to weep with us, to walk with us, to actually suffer with us. We see that on the cross.

So then we, as Christians, as believers, what's the answer to suffering? We step into those suffering places and be like Jesus, the hands and feet of Jesus, and walk through those suffering places with people. So as Christians, we're not supposed to try to escape suffering, we're called to embrace that suffering because we know a brokenhearted healer who heals that suffering.

Sheila: Somebody I wanted to quote. It's a quote of yours. You said, "What matters most is not if our love makes other people change, but that in loving we change."

Ann: So oftentimes, we're result-oriented. If I love you this -- sometimes we get manipulative in our love. I love you because I'm hoping that this is the outcome. As opposed to, I love you unconditionally like God has loved me. And in loving you, I'm the one that gets changed and become more cruciform, more shaped like a cross. I become more like Jesus in surrendering and sacrificing myself.

I think ultimately, what we all long for, scripture says "love bears all things." That word *bear* means stego. Love becomes like a roof for somebody; that I will go ahead and sort of break myself like a roof, to take the storm, to take the winds so that you have a safe place, that I'm not going to manipulate you or try to make you into what I want but it's a safe place for you to come and the love will change me. I'll become a roof and you have a safe place to be real and vulnerable. I'll be stego for you.

Sheila: What do you do, Ann, on the days when you're just worn out?

Ann: It was yesterday!

[Laughter]

Sheila: Me too, actually.

Ann: You know what? I go back to the Psalms over and over again. I think David's raw vulnerability, his lament with God; he is honest with God. He talks about his soul being so downcast and broken. And then as you read through each Psalm and the Psalms as a whole, again and again, yes, we come with our brokenness and our lament, and Jesus, he has hard stops, Jesus does, nine o'clock, six o'clock; hard stops for prayers where he is going back and he is reciting Psalms.

I think if we can model that, that if we even have hard stops during the day, not rolling stops because then you kind of crash and burn, but at times when you say, I'm going to stop at 9:00, I'm going to stop at noon, I'm going to stop at six. I'm going to open up the Psalms. I'm going to be real and honest with God about the brokenness of just today. Of how today I've tripped and fallen and things have been messy. But by the time you get to every Psalm you're back to who is God, I can worship God. I preach gospel back to myself, the truth about who God is and who I am in God.

So I think going back to the Psalms models what do we do with our brokenness? We are real with it and then God becomes more real to us as we're just open and transparent with him.

Sheila: I think one of the things to me that David models is that to the level that you're willing to be honest with God indicates the level of intimacy and trust that God actually loves you.

Ann: Yes! And you experience the communion. If you want real communion with God, you need to be deeply honest with God. He is big enough to take it. He wants the honesty.

Sheila: What would you say to somebody who is just watching and maybe just flipping through to another channel and thinks, well, that's lovely for you nice two Christian ladies, but God's not going to like me. I'm sitting here with half a bottle of Jack Daniels.

Ann: If you knew the level of my brokenness. I call it my "unspoken broken." I think we're all high functioning with our "unspoken broken" but deep down, we have brokenness that we don't even know how to articulate. I think there is more grace in Christ than there is guilt in me.

Sheila: Say that just one more time.

Ann: I hold on to it. There is more grace in Christ than there is guilt in me. Jesus is drawn to the brokenhearted. Jesus, the places that I don't want to draw attention to, Jesus is drawn to those brokenhearted places because he wants to draw something beautiful in those places; the places that I most don't want anyone to see, God most wants to touch those places.

So I think the church, we need to strip off the masks because the outside world knows our own hypocrisy. When we come and say, "I'm so broken! Here are my vulnerable places; let me tell you about things that I'm going to whisper, they're so broken. But can I take you to Jesus? He has got scars and he wants to press his scars into your scars. That's the only place that I know to take my suffering and my brokenness."

So I think, we, as the church, if we can be really honest about our brokenness, that person sitting in a hotel room knows that if the church isn't for the suffering, the church isn't for Christ. The church is the safest place to come with your brokenness. We'll be stego for you. We will be a safe place for you to come and be really real and we will love you unconditionally, always, like Christ has loved us in our own brokenness.

Sheila: Ann, as well as having a huge family, as well as homeschooling them, you then decided there was room in your heart for one more little girl from China who came to you broken. How is she doing?

Ann: She came to us with a literal broken heart. She has half a heart. I guess it was -- it was about me knowing my own brokenhearted-ness, my own realization about I've been abandoned in so many ways and Jesus adopted me, Jesus grafted me in, Jesus wanted me when nobody else wanted me. So adopting a child has been about me understanding and getting to live out exactly what I've experienced. You are never abandoned; you are placed where you are so God can raise you.

Shiloh has been very -- Shiloh's broken heart has healed so much of my own brokenhearted-ness. Every morning when I go to change her, she is two, and I get her dressed. She has this big scar down the midst of her chest where they have had to actually open up her chest. She has had two open heart surgeries, she has got one more in front of her. And she goes, "Mama! Shiloh's brave. Look, mama, Shiloh's brave."

I think all of us have our own scars that nobody sees and every day we have to be so brave to just get out of bed and put one step in front of the other. And Jesus reaches over and takes our hand and says, "I am with you. You are never abandoned. You are never alone. And when you can't take one more step, I will carry you."

Sheila: I cannot think of a more perfect way to tell you about some people who feel abandoned and broken and that nobody else is going to come for them. I recently went to Southeast Asia and spent some time with the worst of the worst and saw Christ redeem. It's a message about brokenness and hope and restoration. Would you 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: It was the most remarkable experience of my life, honestly. I have never seen and felt the presence of evil as much as I did on those streets. And the further back you go, the worse it gets. I walked into a club and went further back and there all these young girls are completely naked. There is no name, there is a number stamped on their leg because they're no longer a person, they're just number 28 or number 4. But that's not who they are to Jesus Christ.

When Christ died on the cross, when he said, "Father, punish me now for everything that Sheila Walsh will ever do, for everything every trafficker will ever do." He had every single one of these children on his heart and to him, they are not a number, they are a name. And to be able to go into those places and say, "Yes, there is a God in heaven. And yes, he heard your prayer. And yes, we are coming and there is a future and there is a hope." And to see those young girls brought to a place of freedom and safety, it is just amazing.

You think, are they too far gone? Absolutely not! When you have tasted the darkness of hell and heaven invades your life, you are on fire for the king. These young men and women are going to grow up and change the world for Jesus because they know he is alive. They have tasted darkness and they have received light.

But there are so many more. We need your help. Our goal is to rescue 5,000 more children this year. We can do it. If you and I do this together, we can do it. For \$128, that enables us to go in to reach, to rescue, and to restore one child. \$1280, 10 children -- that's 10 children. There are so many things that we can do. We always partner with amazing people. We don't go in with our own agenda. We say, "God, what are you doing here? Who are your people here?" And then we get behind them and support them.

We have an amazing matching gift from some of our friends at the moment for \$200,000. That now means if you give \$128 you now have literally rescued two children. I've seen it with my own eyes. Once you've seen it, you're responsible for it. I will never not see that picture. I'll never go to bed at night without praying for these children. And I'm going to go back soon and I want to be able to see some of these children that we've rescued. We need your help.

Would you go to your phone? Would you call and make the best gift possible? Skip a movie this weekend. There is nothing that great out there anyway. Skip a few fancy lattes and save a life! So go online, call, and make your best gift possible. We're going to send you Ann's gift, *The Broken Way*. It is one of the most life changing books I've ever read. But would you help us right now to change a life in Jesus' name? Thanks!

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.

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

End of clip

On the mission field

Lisa: Human trafficking is a sin against humanity. We want to actually stop it before it starts by reaching out, going into the villages, educating the people there. But we're also going to rescue girls that have been trapped in the darkness that are desperate to come out.

But you don't just rescue because we want to restore these girls. We want to give them job opportunities. We want to make them whole again through the love of Jesus Christ.

We can't do it without you! We can't do it without your commitment; we can't do it without your prayers! But we also need you to go to the phone, go online and be generous because we know that you want to be part of rescuing life.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much. This is our last week for Rescue Life so please, make your best gift possible. And for whatever gift you send in, we're going to send you Ann's amazing book. I love the subtitle, *The Broken Way*: A daring path into the abundant life.

Ann, it's always a joy to be with you. Thank you so much for being with us. We pray for God's continual blessing on your life. You're awesome. We love you!

Thank you so much for being with us and we'll see you next time on *Wednesdays in the Word*. God bless you!