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Week 19: Spring Mission Feeding

Wednesdays in the Word

Sheila Walsh

Rebekah Lyons and Ann Voskamp

Sheila: Hello! This is Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. I'm so glad you took some time out to join us. One of my kind of life verses is written -- when Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, this is what he said in First Thessalonians. He said: "We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's good news but our own lives too."

I love that! I love the way that Paul shows here's the good news and here's how the good news is shaping me. There is something about the beauty of transparency that I think is such a healing gift. So I've invited two of the women I consider to be the most transparent women. The way that Christ shines his light through their brokenness is truly breathtaking: Ann Voskamp and Rebekah Lyons. So great to have you both here.

I wanted to ask you first of all, you took some time this year to actually go on the road together with Christy Nockels. I've never met her personally but I just hear glorious things about her. What has that been like for you being on the road together?

Rebekah: Well, we decided to do this tour because we had already traveled at least three trips in one year. We were joking that we were roomies for 30 nights in one year's time and we still loved each other.

Ann: We still loved each other.

Rebekah: So that's what even gave this tour an idea. We were in Israel once and we walked in, we were sharing a room in a kibbutz overlooking Emmaus road. We walked in and there's these little tiny beds; they were about eight inches off the ground. Two twins and they were pushed together, and we stayed there for seven nights and we didn't even push those beds apart. I remember thinking, is this weird? Like it was just -- we just connected so well and shared so much in that season.

Ann: And really the more we talked about brokenness and freedom, the two go together. You can't ever experience freedom without brokenness. Once you've experienced freedom, it comes

from a place of that brokenness and breaking free.

Sheila: It is totally the perfect pairing. But I wanted to ask you, what has it been like so far? What have you seen happen with your audience as you share from -- Ann, you write so much about the beauty of brokenness, and Rebekah, you talk about freedom, what have you seen happening in the audience?

Rebekah: I'm most inspired by watching them minister to each other. So it's almost like we've done that in our friendship and there's almost a commissioning for them to do that. So many of the women are bringing their people or their church or their small group or their friends or family and we end the night...

Ann: Both of us and both of our encounters, engagements with them have been encouraging, "Take somebody's hand, touch somebody's shoulder, feeling brave, cup somebody's face," and we help them speak truth and gospel over each other. When you look into someone's eyes and hear them speak truth to you, that does something to your heart in a really powerful way. So we're really there just to get out of the way and let them really encounter Jesus.

Sheila: You know what I love about that? One of my passionate commitments is to demythicize the platform.

Rebekah: Yes! Everyone has a voice. Everyone is a minister.

Sheila: Because so often I think, it is easy to get up on a platform and speak and ask people to respond but my big question then is well, what now? What happens when they go back home to a marriage that is difficult, to a child that is rebelling? But the fact that you're experiencing...

Ann: But if they can do this in community they have something they can hold on to when they walk out the door, that's somebody that they can lean back into, that they can go ahead and share real time what life is like.

Rebekah: And they all want it. They come alive in that; reminding each other what is true. Then they're like we have each other when we go back home. You've got me on speed dial. That's what we need on those days that are really hard. We need to be reminded of what is true.

Sheila: What have you learned -- I'm going to ask both of you this -- but what have you learned from your friendship and your partnering with Ann on this journey?

Rebekah: I have learned with her what I think Jesus also tells us, that nothing is off limits. Like there is nothing you can share that will push that person away; and that really is Christ's

love. Right? There are sometimes where we'll be like laughing-laughing and then I'm like but then I kind of felt like crying. And she's totally right there with me. And then she'll immediately just share something. I think when you lead with vulnerability in any friendship you immediately connect. And there is something trusted there. I've learned that from you.

Ann: I think what I've learned from you is that we bring our vulnerable places and pieces of each other to each other and there is a communion in that. And then there's always that let's pray here. It's always getting down on our knees, getting down on our faces and really pouring our hearts out and being broken, letting those tears water dry places in us.

I think the times, it's always prayer with you, Rebekah, and it is always pushing into Jesus and I think that's what we bring to each other is hey, I know a brokenhearted healer. And it is that time of prayer that I've found so healing in our friendship.

Rebekah: Yeah, because prayer is that vertical communion and when you can actually share that with a friend and feel like that's a safe, sacred, trusted place, where two or three are gathered but sometimes we don't feel that freedom to pray in a very vulnerable way with friends. But that has been binding for us.

Ann: That's God plowing new life into both of us and he has reaped beautiful things out of that. So if you can find somebody you can be really be honest with and pray with that person, I think there is redemptive life out of that good place.

Sheila: But what you're doing is really show and tell, of what James says about confess your sins one to another and pray for each other so that you may be healed. I have to tell you, God in his mercy knew how much I would need both of you because just even yesterday was just one of my hardest days. I take medication for depression and most days I'm good. But yesterday I just had a hard day. A day where I thought, Lord, I don't know if I can do this much longer.

On days like that, to be able to dig into books of girls who remove the shame from being human and broken, I just want to say thank you.

Ann: I think we want to be seen in our brokenness -- I'm not the only one. And I think just to be known and seen is so powerful. I hope the words we lay down on the page somebody says, "I see what that kind of pain is like. This is mine too. You're not alone."

Rebekah: I had a day like that in December six weeks before my *Freedom* book's coming out; right? I remember sitting in the bathtub and just staring at the wall for what felt like too long to be appropriate and normal. And I remember saying: I need an S.O.S. text to someone right now to join me in prayer.

If we don't have that in the church, what is it that we have to all of the sudden have -- like the fiery dart is still going to come at us; there is no denying that. So to be honest about that and to invite people into that place of vulnerability and just say, "I've got your back. I'm coming around you. We're going before the throne together." We need that.

Sheila: Yeah! Because I think the other element that is hugely important. I do the things I know to do. I take my medication, I try to exercise, I try to eat well. But I also have to remember that we're in a spiritual battle. I have written a book that won't come out until later in 2017 but it is the first time ever that I talk about the fact that for most of my life I've struggled with suicidal thoughts. My dad took his life when he was 34. Suicide is unspeakable to most people but when somebody in your family does it, it puts it on the table. Since I finished the manuscript, I have never felt so attacked. I think that's why we need those people that we can simply say, "Hey. I'm not doing well at all right now."

Rebekah: Well, when you're going after the message, right, the enemy is the author of death. When you're going after that, he is doubling down. I was in torment this fall in the middle of the night. Like ridiculous lies would come over me and I'd wake my husband up and he's like, "Everything you're saying doesn't even make sense."

I was like, "But you don't understand how powerful that can become."

And all the more you have to have people right then even in your present life, long distance is awesome because we do boxer prayers that are very, very long. But when we're together, you also have to have someone that's down the road that can be there in a moment's notice just to say, "This is the day that I need someone right now."

Sheila: One of the things I love that you are both doing is just unveiling the secrets and the lies that keep us so in prison. I had a really interesting experience. A few months ago, I was speaking at a large Christian women's conference and it was very upbeat, very happy and at the end of my message I felt compelled to do something I've never done before. And so I simply said from the platform, "If you have ever attempted to take your life or if you struggle with suicidal thoughts, would you join me at the front?" There was over 500 women, ages from 14-75.

There is some things we think, you can't confess that, particularly if you're a Christian or if you're a Christian leader. I mean, clean your act up! But then you realize, some of them -- I think two of the most powerful words in the English language are, "me too." I think that's what you were doing through your books and through speaking on the road.

Do you ever feel it's too much? Do you ever feel too vulnerable?

Ann: I was in Grand Rapids with a group of women and they were bringing *The Broken Way* and I was signing copies. All of the sudden I just started to weep. I realized, oh my goodness, what have I done? All of these women are carrying around my heart in their hands and I couldn't get it together. I had to go to the washroom and wash my face off.

We feel like, I have shared -- when you've written for an audience of one, you've written in a really vertical space before the Lord and then you realize, it is out there. And so many times when I meet women I just, "Thank you for being a safe place to trust with pieces of my heart."

Because it is -- it is messy and it is incredibly vulnerable. It is vulnerable because your story is never told in a vacuum; it brushes up against other people's in your own life too. And I just think it is a beautiful thing in the body of Christ when we can say, "It's okay. I will steward your story well. I will carry it as a precious gift and see that you meant it as a balm for my own brokenness too."

Sheila: Wow! When you write on freedom, how does that -- because you're married, you have children, you have a life. I sometimes think if we could just take what we believe and go and sit in a room somewhere, sit in a corner and just be like, "I'll be here believing this" but then you bump into a person. How do you daily remain free?

Rebekah: You know what's funny about the book is some of the most popular chapters are "Free to Grieve," "Free to be Weak," "Free to wait." It's almost like, the freedom of even being in that brokenness and knowing that he is covering it, he sees it.

When I read Hebrews ten and that idea of God says, "I will write my laws on their hearts and bind them on their minds. And I will never again remember their sins or their lawless acts." I'm like nuh-huh! Wait a minute. Because you heard me this morning with my kids. I don't know how you...

The credit of Christ's righteousness in our hearts and lives, it is just staggering to me because then it goes, yes, I'm fallen and broken and in need of a savior, and because of that savior, Christ's righteousness, God sees that on me. There is no greater act of love, unconditional love because we know -- we know. We bring our mess and he redeems it all. So my family like, you know, all of our families, they see it all. They see it all and there is a lot of apologies going around. And there's a lot of like "New mercies in the morning, guys!"

Sheila: Don't you think that's a gift to our children? I think when you can be honest with your children and say, "I'm not going to get it all right, and I blew it here," it gives them permission to show up as well and be real.

Rebekah: When Pierce was like five I said, "I'm sorry, son. I shouldn't have handled that." He goes, "It's okay, mom. We all sin." Thanks for pointing that out. Yep, that's true.

Sheila: Okay, I want to throw a verse at you because for me with the way we are in the states at the moment with what's going on in our nation, with what's going on in the church, this is one of the most important verses to me. First Peter 3:15: But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

What that verse says to me is that as believers we should be living lives that raise questions but with gentleness and respect. I love the fact that you and your husband Gabe have this Q Ideas. Tell us a little bit about that, Rebekah.

Rebekah: Well, Q stands for questions and it really is where we ask the church one question: What is faithfulness look like when the culture seems lost? Right? And we started this 13 years ago when it didn't feel as relevant as it does even now. So we'll ask the church, how do we navigate the tensions of our day with all of the issues that are at hand? There are so many now and what does faithfulness to Jesus look like? Well, it does include humility and kindness and respect. Absolutely! But also, there were some moments earlier this spring where I felt compelled by the spirit, like I could not shake it, it was one of those crazy -- I need to say something about this, especially women in particular.

I have a very deep-seated conviction on that we were never made to begin or end life, to make that decision. So that breaks my heart, obviously, like it does so many others. So sometimes we are called to speak and to do that with boldness but also with humility, and clothed in that kind of kindness.

Sheila: I read the other day that so many millennials, my son, that's my son's age, he is 20, are walking away from church. I wondered if you had any perspective and why you think that is so and what you think that we as the church can do to live a life that would make people want to run to us rather than from us?

Rebekah: You go and then I will.

Ann: I think the millennials are looking at the suffering and the brokenness in the world and saying, "If you're the church, if it is about healing, if you care about these things, are you showing up? Where is your compassion for the brokenness in the world? Is getting saved then just about sort of getting into your life raft and hanging on and you're okay. Or is being saved about trying to save others? And caring about places where there is suffering, caring

about famine, caring about sex trafficking, caring about refugee crisis, caring about where people are in dire need of someone to show up and be like Jesus."

I think millennials are looking at the church and saying, "Who is Jesus really? Would Jesus show up in these places and is the church showing up in these places?"

So I think we need to open our Bibles, as we read these verses, gospel compels us to go out into the world and be the hands and feet of Jesus. So it is not about sort of escaping into our little comfort enclaves but it's about going and being comfort in places that are in dire need.

So I think they're looking at us and saying, "How are you incarnating gospel? How are you pulling on skin over the words of Jesus and going into hard places and being willing to suffer for those who are suffering?"

Sheila: I notice some of the people that you have with Q Idea are people like Ravi Zacharias, some of these greats. What is one of the things that you've heard that you think is the most important message for the church and what does it look like to be faithful?

Rebekah: Well, our last Q Comments, which is kind of a town hall gathering. We had one a few months back with about 105 cities that all participate. Well, Lecrae was at that one and he said, "Some people wanted me to keep the peace." He said, "I wasn't ever asked to keep the peace. I'm called to make peace. And that's a far more dangerous thing."

Sheila: Wow! I think too of what John Piper said, passion, a couple of years ago, when he was talking about how we're all scared about what is going to happen. He said, "It's not our responsibility to stay alive, it is our responsible to stay in love with Jesus." Which I think is so powerful.

I'm so grateful for both of you. I said to my son last night. I said, "I'm interviewing Ann Voskamp tomorrow. Do you know her?" He said, "Mom, she makes a difference." So the fact that your life, Ann impacts my 20-year old son, I just personally want to say thank you for being a role model for kids who want all or nothing. That's my son. He says, "I'm all in, Mom or it's not worth it."

Ann: It's all in. We're not playing games here it's for real because he is real.

Sheila: I had an amazing experience recently. I spent some time with some of the needy, some of the poorest of the poor. When you get to sit down with people in Angola. One of our desires is not to just rush in but to sit with their own leaders and say, "Talk to us. Tell us how can we help you." And they were gracious enough to do this. Would you watch this?

On the mission field

Announcer: Everybody knows that there are hungry children in Africa and we know that something needs to be done. UNICEF knows that Angola has one of the highest child mortality rates in the world and malnutrition is a major contributing factor. This village leader knows that without crops his community is in grave danger.

Open Captions:

>> We are facing a serious problem with our food. We don't have enough. Without the rain, we cannot grow crops to eat.

Announcer: This mother knows the heartache of watching her children wither away from malnutrition.

Open Captions:

>> His skin is getting very loose. It started with a fever, then diarrhea and vomiting.

Announcer: And this child knows the pain of going to bed hungry. But just knowing about malnutrition in Africa won't help anyone. The actions that we choose to do together will help save a child's life.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: It's literally breath-stopping to walk into a malnutrition clinic and sit on the bed with the mothers as they hold their children who struggle to take one breath. So much I didn't understand. I made some comment to one of our local people about I'd never seen the red hair. He said, "That's because they have no protein and their skin is peeling off and they struggle to take a breath."

The amazing thing was I went from the malnutrition clinic where we spent a couple of days and the next day I got to go to one of the villages where we are feeding children and suddenly it all made sense. One bowl of this nutritious food literally begins to reverse the cycle from death to life. I watched these darling children line up in the hot sun for hours laughing and playing and being like children -- and all it took was a simple bowl of food.

At the moment we are feeding 400,000 children in Africa. But when I left Angola the last time one of the village leaders, the most beautiful godly man said, "Please don't stop! We've seen the difference."

Children used to not be able to come to school because they would faint halfway there so they wouldn't come. So it is not just that it feeds them, it breaks the whole cycle of devastation because if a child can't go to school and they have no food, they have no future. But the amazing thing is that we have set up these programs in schools, and so the parents send the children to school because they know they will get a meal and then they will stay in school. So you're giving that child a future and a hope.

I've stood beside mothers where honestly, there was one village where I didn't meet one mom who hadn't buried at least two children. The thing that just is mind-blowing to me is we can change this. It is not impossible. That's why we're there. For just \$30 you're going to feed three children, \$50 feeds five, \$100 feeds ten children. Think of how easily we blow \$30. But that would feed three children for three months. It will literally give them life.

When I left those villages, our team, we promised them, "We're not going to forget you." And I will not forget them. We can do this but we need to do it together.

So please, would you go to your phone and make the best gift you can? I know some of you don't have much and I get that, just give what you've got. Jesus never asked you to feed the 5,000. He says, "What do you have? What do you have?" If you bring what you have, he blesses it and he breaks it and he feeds his people. We can change the world. We're God's people -- it is our responsibility and our joy. Please go to your phone. Please call in and please do it now. Thank you.

Begin video clip

Announcer: In impoverished and even now famine-stricken areas of Africa, children are suffering. The need is great and without food they face death by starvation.

LIFE's Mission Feeding program is ready. With your support, we're able to feed and care for children in famine areas of Sudan, as well as Angola and Mozambique. With all of our previous reserves gone and Mission Feeding facing the worst drought and food shortage in years, we urgently need to replenish our food supplies to reach 400,000 children counting on us.

Your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 will help feed and care for three, five or ten children for the next three months. Please also consider a special gift of \$1400 to help sponsor a school and help feed 140 children for three full months.

With your gift of any amount we'll send you My Daily Word Devotional. This boxed set of four seasonal devotionals will help you read, reflect, and renew yourself through God's word with space to journal your thoughts and reflect each day.

With your gift of \$100 or more, you'll also receive Kari Jobe's newest music project, *The Garden*, along with the story behind *The Garden* companion DVD.

And finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more, please be sure to request "Determined Eagle," our 2017 commemorative bronze sculpture.

Please call, write, or go online today and make your gift of *LIFE* to help feed and care for hungry children.

End of clip

On the mission field

Sheila: Can you hear them coughing? Can you hear that deep chest cough? Because their resistance is so low that the least little thing becomes a serious life or death issue for these children.

I don't know if you realize, but every time that you pick up the phone and you call or every time you go online, these are the people whose lives that you're changing. Our prayer is that we can save this little one but my prayer is that we can save hundreds of other children before they get to this stage. No child should ever get to this stage. No mom should ever have to watch this. So if we do something now, we can stop this from happening.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much. If the phones are busy, keep calling. Don't give up. Our guest today, Ann Voskamp, *The Broken Way*, Rebekah Lyons, *You Are Free*; for any gift we will send you these books.

I just want to thank you so much not just for what you've shared today but for who you are -- for being the hands and feet of Christ out there, for being real and transparent. We love you so much! Thank you for being with us.

And thank you for joining us. Remember, if you need prayer, we're here for you too. Thank you

that you help us help other people. But maybe you need a little prayer right now. Just know we are here for you too.

I'm Sheila Walsh saying thank you so much for being with us on *Wednesdays in the Word*. See you next time!