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Week 23: Spring Mission Feeding
Wednesdays in the Word
Sheila Walsh
Kay Warren #2

Sheila: Hi, I'm Sheila Walsh. Thanks for joining me in *Wednesdays in the Word*.

One of the things I love about the book of Psalms is how honest the Psalmist David is. Do you ever read them out loud? Sometimes I do. Sometimes if I'm having a really rough day and I love the fact that he doesn't pretend to always be okay. Even if you look at Psalm 42 David will say, "Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad?"

Now he will go on to say, "I will put my hope in God. I will praise him again." But he is saying you know what? At the moment that's not where I'm at. I'm really struggling.

I cannot tell you how the Psalms of David have helped me in some of my darkest days. One of the things I feel passionately about is to bring that kind of honesty to us in the church when it comes to those who struggle with darkness a lot. We have not always been that great in the church at dealing with mental illness and understanding those who struggle with mental illness. So I actually consider it a privilege that I do have a mental illness. It means I can look at somebody else who is having a hard time and say, "You know what? Me too. I get it. You're not alone."

But I don't know anybody who God is using more profoundly in our nation at the moment to address these issues than my friend who is with me today, Kay Warren. Thanks for being here, Kay.

It's hard for me to ask you about the most devastating thing that happened in your life because I feel as if talking about your son, Matthew, I feel like I'm treading on holy ground. But I feel that you have a perspective of, as a mother, of a son who struggled with mental illness for some time. Can you give us a little perspective of what that journey looks like and feels like?

Kay: Well, as hard as it is to talk about I'm so glad that you ask and I'm so glad that you are willing to talk about your own life and your own struggles. It's one of the things I admire so deep about you. I ask that God will refresh you as you refresh others with your vulnerability and your

openness.

My Matthew was amazing. But he had mental illness from the time he was very young. He was diagnosed with clinical depression when he was seven but he could have been diagnosed earlier if we had known that children can have a mental illness. We didn't know. We just thought he was different than his brother and sister. We thought the things, the ways he acted and the ways that he thought, that he would outgrow them. We didn't know that he was living with a mental illness from the time he was about three or four. Who knew that children could struggle that young? But he did -- he struggled until the day he died when he was 27. His illness got worse and worse. He definitely fell into the category of severe mental illness.

If I could just digress for a second. Sometimes with mental illness that's what we think of. We think of someone so ill like my son who can't really function in this life, but actually, I have lived with depression my whole life, not severe depression but I have depression. Everybody feels anxious sometimes, it's when those things start to cross over and get in the way of normal life. When anxiety and depression or you just can't cope with friends or work or job, then it starts moving over into mental illness.

But even so, that's not that everybody is like my Matthew. But he lived most of his life with a severe mental illness. He started talking about suicide when he was 12. Since he's died, I've found some of his writings where he was actually talking about it sooner but we didn't know it. One of the worst days of my life was a Mother's Day when he was 12. It had been hard day. We knew he was depressed. As I kind of tucked him in that night, in the dark, I was just prayed with him and was getting ready to walk out of the room. And as I started to leave he said, "Mom, will you kill me and put me out of my misery?"

I was so glad that the room was dark because he couldn't see my face. I managed to get through that and say, "Oh buddy, I'm so sorry that you're feeling so sad. I love you so much."

Did my best; walked out of the room. My older son was standing out in the hall and I collapsed in his arms and my thought was no mother should ever hear her child say, "Please kill me" on Mother's Day, "and put me out of my misery." But it was the agony and the torture that he lived with.

Of course, doctors, medication, programs, hospitalizations, everything that we knew to do and yet by the time Matthew was 27 he didn't really want to die, he just wanted the pain to stop. And as I talk to people, that is what I hear over and over again: "I don't really want to die, I just want the pain to stop." And there is that sense of that, sometimes people feeling as he obviously did the day that he took his life that there was no other way out. There was no option, it was never going to be any different.

So my heart just -- it was the worst day of my life. It was my nightmare that he would eventually take his life. I can tell you that we were devastated and are devastated but we are not destroyed; that's the hope for us and for anyone living with mental illness. There can be devastation but it does not mean that you will be destroyed. I believe that. I believe it for us even though we've lost our Matthew.

He's actually -- he's in heaven, he's in the arms of Jesus and so I know I'll see him again. So even for him, the devastation was not complete. God redeems. And in our lives, his dad and I and his brother and sister, all those who loved him, devastation but we are not destroyed.

Sheila: One of the things that I'm so grateful that you and Rick are very much involved in is helping educate the church. Because last year I was speaking in a church and I talked about my father's suicide. I said, "So many people called my father a coward. They don't understand how hard he fought to make it to 33. That's not the act of coward. That's the -- he'd just come to the place where he couldn't do it anymore."

Kay: It makes me mad. It makes me mad when people say that because it just shows they don't understand. I just try to say they don't understand and not stay angry. But when people say that that's the coward's way out. No, I'm sorry. They don't have any idea. That just means you have never walked into spare shoes. If you have walked into spare shoes you know that it takes every ounce of courage to live one more day; to get out of bed one more day, to face those sometimes screaming voices in your head that tell you to end it, that it's never going to change, the enemy wanting to take you down; to live one more day and to fight through one more day of that, takes the greatest amount of courage.

I actually think some of the greatest heroes when we get to heaven are going to be the people that as we see them and as we meet all the other folks in heaven, some of the greatest heroes are going to be the people who fought every single day of their life to live.

Sheila: I absolutely agree with that. But the thing that was devastating for me was after I had talked about how I couldn't wait for that day when I would see my dad again, and at the end a woman had to practically carry this young woman to talk to me because her dad had committed suicide six months before and the church had told her that her dad was in hell. My heart was just broken for her. Also, I wanted to find the people who told her that and said say, "Where did you find that?"

Kay: First I want to pound them and then I want to show them the verses in scripture.

Sheila: It is so cruel. Do you see a shift, Kay? Do you think we're learning more in the

church about how to deal?

Kay: Slowly -- really slowly -- especially around suicide. I think there is some great progress around talking about mental illness. I think that as people understand more and more that it is real and it is common and it is treatable, that it is not that you're weak in character or that if you pray just a little bit more or confess a sin, when they understand that mental illness is an illness I think that that's helping in the church with people getting rid of the stigma.

But when it comes to suicide and suicidal thoughts, it's a much slower progression of understanding. For us to be able -- this may sound weird but it gives me such joy to be able to talk to families who have lost someone. Their family member loved Jesus and yet they're fearful of where they are. I love to be able to bring the comfort to them of John ten where Jesus said, "I know my sheep and they're in my hands and nothing -- no one can take them out of my hands."

I've had people say, "But what if this person took themselves out of Jesus' hand."

I'm like, "Excuse me, he said, 'No one can take them out of my hands.'" Romans eight: Nothing can separate us, neither life nor death, nor demons or principalities -- nothing can separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ."

So to be able to say to people, "Your loved one loved Jesus, they're in his arms."

Sheila: My dad was an amazing singer and his favorite hymn he used to sing was "There were 99 that safely lay in the Shelter of the Fold." It took me... I probably was in my late 30s when I had the courage to go to the place where my dad drowned himself. But what I thought might have been a place of tremendous despair actually was a place of tremendous peace because I felt as if I heard Jesus say, "That night I went out and I found my lost sheep and I carried him home."

Kay: I say when Matthew's, when his body fell, he shot himself, and as his body fell Jesus grabbed him. There were angels in that room and they carried him into the presence of God. He didn't hit the ground alone and out of Jesus' love. Jesus was there. Jesus caught him. Jesus caught him.

Sheila: [Sighing] I had the privilege of speaking at your Church and Mental Health Symposium, and I know this is an ongoing passionate work for you, there was quite an interesting group of people you had there. One of the gentlemen I got to speak to had been the former head of the American Psychiatric Association. I loved him! I had lunch with him and --

Kay: Well, he loved you!

Sheila: I remember him saying to me, "Mental illness is not curable but it is treatable." I thought that was fantastic information for people who think -- because I've had people say to me, "Well, Sheila, do you still take medication?"

I'm like, "Yes, I do. I take that pill with a prayer of thanksgiving every day."

And they're like, "Don't you believe Jesus can heal you?"

I'm like, "Absolutely I believe he will. And if he will, I'll let you know. And until then I'll take my pill with a prayer of thanksgiving."

Kay: And that goes to that still trying to dispel that stigma around mental illness as being something in your character or if you just try harder or pray harder, whatever, that it's going to go away.

Does Jesus heal instantly? Of course, he does. We all know the stories. People who are healed of addiction in an instant. People who are healed of cancer. Mental -- yes, he does it. He doesn't usually choose to do that though. So for the rest of us who don't receive that kind of an instantaneous miracle, it doesn't have anything to do with faith, it has to do with God's sovereignty and what he has chosen to do in each person's life.

So what I try to tell people is that there's not just any one solution or one way to deal with mental illness. We're a whole. God has made us body, soul, and spirit. There are things that have to happen in our minds, things that have to happen in our bodies, things that have to happen in our emotions to give us the ability to manage a mental illness well.

So go to your doctor. Take blood tests. See if there is something that is going on that is causing some of the symptoms. Eat as well as you can. Get sleep. Exercise; take care of your body. Go and get a diagnosis from a psychiatrist if these things are not helping. See if there is a medication that you might need to be on.

Emotionally, you and I all have broken places that we need healing, ways that we've adapted to life. Therapy counseling, I'm a big believer, I've done my share of it. Relationally, people with mental illness tend to burn bridges with relationships so there is healing. And spiritually, draw close to God in intimacy. We are whole beings.

So for mental illness to be managed, all of those things need to transpire; medication, but Sheila, I know you are also working with your relationship with Jesus every single day.

Sheila: And also acknowledging spiritual warfare. We don't just fight against flesh and blood.

There's been nights when I -- that's been part of my story all my life that I've struggled with suicidal thoughts. Sometimes my only prayer is just the name of Jesus. There is nights that literally that's all I can do is speak the name of Jesus.

Kay: I don't know if you understand the power of what you just said on a television show to millions of people. [Emotional] That you said, "I have lived with suicidal thoughts my whole life." And yet here you sit, Sheila as somebody saying, "Jesus is my all in all. I will live every day of my life for him." The freedom of you saying that, I'm a little bit -- I don't even know the words. I just feel like God is unchaining people who have lived with such shame about their own mental illness and their suicidal thoughts. Who do they tell? Who do they tell? For you to say that...

Sheila: Don't you think that it is just time that we shine the brightest light into the darkest corners of the church? -- Whatever you're struggling with, whatever it is. One of my favorite verses is in Psalm 56. It says that God gathers all of our tears, he captures them in his bottle and I think that there's a -- in fact, I have a little -- I stuck it in my pocket before I left today. This actually is a little tear bottle. I think one of the most profound things because I think there are some people probably even watching who think, nobody on this earth understands the weight of what I've wept or how much but God does. He understands the weight.

I have maybe a strange question but did Matthew ever feel like God let him down?

Kay: I think that was one of the hardest things for us as his parents. I mean his dad wrote a book called *The Purpose Driven Life* and to have his son struggle with God and God's purpose for him, it was such agony for Rick to know that he could help so many other people and yet his dearest son struggled with finding and hearing God's purpose.

Matthew accepted Christ as a little boy and loved Jesus but as he got older and his own personal struggles were magnified and became more intense, and as the mental illness clouded his thinking and interrupted some of the logical clear thoughts that you and I have, he began to feel like God had let him down.

I watched my son, sometimes say, "I just need him to come and sit on this couch and tell me why he has allowed so much pain and suffering in this world? Why did he allow me as a little boy to live my whole life wanting to be close to him and yet feeling so distanced? God just needs to come sit on this couch and tell me why he made the world this way."

For a long time I would try to come up with answers, "Well, that's not the way God works. He's already spoken through his son." -- all the things. But as a parent to watch my son struggle to want to be close. You know, Sheila, I don't have good answers for that. I don't have some pat

formula as to why.

Sheila: Because it is a valid question.

Kay: It is a very valid question, that's why I couldn't say, "Oh you need to stop asking that question." All I could say was, "Buddy, I don't know but I'm sitting on the couch next to you. I'm sitting next to you and my arms are around you and I'll hold your hand. And together we'll ask God to answer those questions. I don't know."

Sheila: I think for me, one of the most devastating stories in the New Testament is John the Baptist in the beginning of Matthew 11 when he is sitting in prison and all he knows is that Messiah is supposed to be the one who comes and releases those who sit in prison and Jesus is not coming. And he sends his disciples and says, "Will you ask Jesus, are you the one? Did I get it wrong?"

And it is when Jesus says, "Go back and tell John, the blind see, the lame..." But then this little phrase of "Blessed is he who is not offended by me." Will you love a God who doesn't live up to your expectations? Who doesn't answer prayer the way you want prayer answered? Will you worship when nothing makes sense?

Kay: Yeah. We prayed for Matthew to be healed. I had to deal with that myself, not only for Matthew's sorrow and struggle but our sorrow and struggle when he died. Because Sheila, we went out on a limb. We were so far out on that faith limb that God was going -- I felt like God had given me a word. I'd done a fleece, the old Gideon fleece thing and I felt like God had given me a fleece that he was going to heal Matthew here.

And when Matthew died it was crushing. Not only just to lose my son but like John the Baptist, I felt that same thing. I'm sitting there, wait! You're the releaser of those behind bars. You're the freedom guy. Where was that for Matthew? And to struggle through and to understand as best I can.

I have a little mystery pot. I have this little pot where I throw all my questions. It is a little ceramic pot because there are questions that I don't know what to do with. I don't have good answers. What I do know is that I trust God with all that I am. I have more hope than I've ever had. But do I have God figured out? Not in the slightest. So all those questions of, why didn't he heal Matthew? Why didn't he answer Matthew's prayer in the way that Matthew prayed? Why didn't he let John the Baptist out of the prison? Why did he let him... I don't know! But they go in that mystery pot and I know that when I see Jesus face to face that those questions, as C.S. Lewis says, will die away in the presence of the answerer himself. I'm holding on to that.

Sheila: I love the fact that Kay encourages us to ask the questions. So often we think that's not holy or it's blasphemous. It is not. It actually decides how deeply you trust God, that you're willing to ask the tough, tough questions.

One of the things that I love about the privilege of doing what we do is that I've discovered our brokenness is a far better bridge to other people than pretend wholeness ever is. So one of the things that we care about so much today at *LIFE Today* is being able to help those around the world who are suffering.

But can I say just quickly, if you're hurting right now, if you need somebody to pray for you just to say, "I get it. You're not alone," call the number on the screen. We have amazing men and women who would just love to pray for you. So please, copy that number down. Maybe there's a time that will come up when you need somebody to just say, "Yeah, I'm here."

The other thing I love is that those of you who have been faithful to this ministry for years are helping us make a difference to those who are living in real desperation with really big good questions right now. Why don't I have enough food to feed my children? Watch this, would you?

On the mission field

Announcer: South Sudan is facing one of the worst food crises since 2011. Parts of the country are experiencing the onset of famine causing thousands of families to flee their villages.

Open Captions: I didn't think we would survive. We didn't know what was happening. So we started running. My two brothers died and I don't know what happened to my father.

Announcer: Theresa's story is not unique. It is the story of the children of South Sudan who have been forced from their villages in search of food.

In their desperate struggle to survive thousands are forced to forage for anything to fight off starvation. According to the U.N. nearly one half of South Sudan's population are expected to be at risk of death in the coming months due to food shortages if help does not arrive very soon.

Open Captions: Now that you are here, can you please help us? Because people are still dying.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: To have a child like that simply say, "Can you please help us?" And you know what the resounding answer is, absolutely yes, we can! Sometimes you look at a situation like that and it looks overwhelming. You're like, there is no way we can fix that! But here's the great news. We're just doing our part here at *LIFE Outreach International* and at the moment we have been to set up a feeding program for 400,000 children. It's such a joy to go into these villages where our feeding programs are already in place, and to see the children laugh and be the way kids should be. And then times I'll go into a village where it is not set up yet and I see the difference. But we have promised those village chiefs and those people who work with those kids in those schools that we will keep this help coming. So it is really important that you join with us. And it is really doable. That's the thing that blows me away!

For \$30 we can provide food for three children for three months; \$50 provides food for five children; \$100 feeds ten children for three months. There is so many schools, you can actually -- if you were able to donate \$1400 and some of you can, do you know that will feed a whole school for three months? And the amazing thing about it is it starts to break the cycle of poverty because most kids don't come to school when they are starving. But in villages where there is a feeding program and we make a point, we feed the kids at school so the mom and dad will send the child to school because they know they'll get food there. Then they stay in school and then they're able to break that cycle and go on to live this God-designed life.

I've looked into the eyes of these moms and dads who talk about what it's like not to be able to provide for your children. One of the moms said to me, "Sometimes I've literally just got enough to give my two children a little bit." I say, "Well, do you do yourself?" She has nothing. I said, "What do you do when you go to sleep with an empty stomach?" You know what she said to me? "I put my head down on the pillow and I say, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.'"

I've found tremendous faith in areas where you would think they would question God. But they haven't. They're holding on and they're believing. And we are the answer to their prayer. When that little one says, "Can you help us?" What a joy to be able to say, "Absolutely! We can help you!"

So please, will you go to your phone now? Will you give the best gift possible? \$30 to feed three children for three months? You can go online and give that way.

And for any gift at all that you send, we have Kay Warren's amazing book, *Sacred Privilege*. If you want to send in \$5600 to sponsor feeding for 140 children for a year, if you're able to give a gift that size, we'd also love to send you Kari Jobe's beautiful CD and DVD.

But we can all do something. If we all bring what we have we will make a difference in this

world in Jesus' name.

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

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much for helping! Thank you for making a difference. Kay, thank you so much for your willingness to speak out of the most difficult, broken, painful place in your life. If people want to find out more, is there a website they can go to?

Kay: Yeah! Hope 4 -- the number four, the Hope4MentalHealth.com and also KayWarren.com. Love to have people check us out there. There's resources, more information, videos, all sorts of fun things!

Sheila: Fantastic! Thank you! Thank you so much for being us. I'll see you next time on *Wednesdays in the Word*.