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Week 25: Spring Mission Feeding, Last Week

Wednesdays in the Word

Sheila Walsh: The Shelter of God's Promises: More

Sheila: Hello! I'm Sheila Walsh and I want to welcome you to *Wednesdays in the Word*. I love the fact that so many of you have written to me or put things on my Facebook page and said, "We look forward to tuning in and to hearing something from God's word that will really touch our lives right now." Because honestly, that's why we're here. That's why we do this. We all have great ideas, we all can do our homework but it is God's word that has the power to transform the way we live.

We've been looking in this series at some of the promises of God. There are over 3,000 promises in the word of God. So today, we're going to look at a promise that I'm sure you're very familiar with. It is one of the most quoted scriptures, for good reasons: Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

On the surface this is one of the easiest promises to understand; pretty straight forward but I also think it is one of the easiest to misinterpret. Even now I'm thinking of notes that I've seen on my Facebook page. For example: "I asked God for a husband and he hasn't given me one." Or "I've been seeking for a job but I can't find anything." One of the most heartbreaking ones, "I've been knocking on heaven's door about the health of my child until my knuckles bleed but no answer. What am I doing wrong?"

So my question for us is what did Jesus mean when he gave us these words? And what was actually happening at the time when he spoke?

Let me back up for a minute and give you a personal story. I brought my son Christian and his friend Chase with me to Fort Lauderdale, Florida where I was speaking at a conference one weekend and I'd built in some extra beach time with the boys.

As they had reached the grand old age of ten they'd requested a room of their own. Well, after choking down a little laugh I told them we'd get adjoining rooms and they would have to leave their door open. Well, after getting them settled, I asked if they wanted to have dinner in their room or in the restaurant and they agreed that room service sounded better. So I gave them

menus to look at and I went next door to unpack my suitcase. Well, after a few moments Christian popped his head around the door and he asked, "Can I order for Chase and me? I know what to do. Please!"

The truth is, Christian had been traveling with me since he was six weeks old. I was fairly confident he could handle the task. "Okay," I said, "but if they ask to speak to an adult I'm right here."

"Okay!" He cried as he dashed back into the next room.

Well, I could hear the boys chatting away and I couldn't resist listening.

"So you've done this before?" Chase asked.

"Hundreds of times," Christian said.

"And we don't need money?" Chase prodded.

"No, dude! It is like a miracle! You just call up and you order whatever you want and they bring it on a tray. You sign a piece of paper and that's it."

"Wow!" Chase said.

"I know! Right! Wow!" Christian echoed.

Well, I waited until I heard the knock on their door and I stood in the entranceway that connected our rooms to make sure that whoever was delivering their food saw that they were not alone and vulnerable. Christian dutifully signed the check and I showed the server out.

When I turned around I saw for the first time what they had actually ordered, two large pepperoni pizzas, one for each of them, a pint of ice cream each, and a pot of hot chocolate.

"Look at this, mom!" Christian announced. "And it didn't cost us a thing!"

Well, that night I explained the inner workings of room service to my son and his fascinated friend. I told him that yes, there are wonderful things for the asking. He could have ordered steaks, he could have ordered cheesecake and yes, you don't receive if you don't ask. But I also helped them understand there really is no such thing as a free lunch.

As I think back now on that evening, it kind of horrifies and amuses me to think, they could have

just gone down the whole menu and ordered everything on there. Instead, they went for what I called good ol' boy food. Granted it wasn't perhaps the most nutritious meal and they both looked distinctly uncomfortable as they lay on top of their beds later that night looking like beached whales but they were happy.

I began to think about their order. I wondered if in many ways we don't do this exact thing in our relationship with God. How many times after all have I asked God for what seems familiar or comfortable or something that is just impulsively appealing? Yet how many times have I needed something entirely different than the thing I've prayed for? How many times have I asked God for things I never even considered the cost that Christ paid to make that possible?

But here in the book of Matthew Jesus invites us to ask, to seek, and to knock. So what was actually going on when this invitation was extended on the hillside that day? The whole of Matthew's gospel is divided into five major passages of teaching and one of the most fascinating of those is what we call the "Sermon on the Mount." The Sermon on the Mount begins with the beatitudes in Matthew Chapter five and ends in chapter seven with this invitation to ask, to seek, and to knock.

The Sermon on the Mount is a foundational teaching in which Jesus reveals what is expected in the kingdom of heaven of those who are his disciples. And to those listening on the hill that day, what Christ actually said was revolutionary. With this powerful sermon, Jesus was promising a radical transformation in how we think, and how we live. I can see the people leaning in when Jesus sat down to teach, an indication to the crowd that he was adopting the position of a teaching rabbi. But what they were about to hear would shock them as much as if Jesus had yelled in their faces because his promise was about more. Whatever we ask, he has more in store. Also, whatever we think he wants from us, he requires more. What he's about to say will change everything.

Well, certainly the people on the hillside didn't expect what Jesus was going to say that day. He was teaching with authority, yep, they got that but his words and this promise would blow them away. He would give them comfort and then he would challenge them. He would tell them it was the heart that mattered and then say, because of the heart we should live higher with more abandon, with more passion.

To understand how striking Jesus' promise to us is you have to kind of picture the scene and put yourself in the place of the people who first heard it. The Sermon on the Mount was no simple sermon of nice blessings and Jesus didn't ease into the teaching that day or begin with a "Hello" and a lovely greeting to the people. He actually blew them away because the first word out of Christ's mouth riveted the crowd because it was not a word ever, ever associated with ordinary people: Blessed.

This is so significant because the word *blessed* was a powerful word to those who heard Jesus that day. What they would hear, to them, it meant divine joy, perfect happiness. And it described the kind of joy believed to be experienced only by the Gods or the dead. That was what was used in pagan Greek literature of the day to describe happiness that only they could know. Blessed! It implied an inner security and a rest that didn't depend on outward circumstances or an ability to keep the rules for happiness. For Jesus' audience, this was a revolutionary concept.

Remember the Pharisees had taught them that righteousness was tied to external behavior. It was a matter of obeying rules and regulations of which they had about 624. You and I know the big ten, the commandments, but a devout Jew in those days had 624 laws to follow. The Pharisees had taught that praying, giving, fasting, and keeping all of the other dietary and Sabbath rules would measure your righteousness.

Now some of the rules that the Jews had to live by make very little sense to you and us living today. For example, here's one of the rules: On the Sabbath, if you put out a lamp because someone in the house was sick and you wanted him to be able to sleep -- that was not breaking the law. But if you put out the lamp just to save oil -- that was breaking the law.

Another one: If a Jewish sailor was caught in a storm after sunset on Friday when Sabbath had begun, if he touched the helm, even simply to steer away to save his life or the life of his passengers, that was breaking the law.

This one is even more bizarre. In those days treatment to alleviate toothache pain was to put vinegar on the offended tooth. Now, if you did that on the Sabbath, you were breaking the law. If however you happened to put a lot of vinegar on your food that day and it had the side effect of stopping the toothache, the rabbis would say, "Hmm, if he's healed, he's healed." And no law was broken. Hard for us to wrap our heads around.

But in the beatitudes Jesus describes how character flows from inside the human heart. I can only imagine the people leaning in and whispering among themselves, "Is this really possible? Does God really just care about our hearts?"

Well, they were just about to take a big breath when Jesus' message got more complicated. He told the crowd that they're salt and light. If salt loses its flavor, he said it's no use anymore. Same with the light; if you hide a lamp under a basket it doesn't help anyone at all.

And then, Jesus pretty well dropped a bombshell. Let's look at this passage. It is found in Matthew chapter five verses 17 through 20. Let me read this to you: "Do not think that I've come to abolish the law or the prophets. I've not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For

truly I tell you until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven for I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Wow! Can you imagine? Can you imagine the people thinking, okay, Lord. You had me for a bit there but now you've lost me completely. First of all you tell me that what matters is my heart but then you tell me that unless my righteousness exceeds those who have been holding those laws over our heads, I'm not getting into heaven? It is pretty confusing.

But Jesus actually doesn't stop to explain at that point. He goes on teaching. He talked about anger. He talked about lust. And he talked about divorce. Many who have struggled with the issue of divorce, even today, take these verses out of context in our 21st century culture viewing them almost as if Christ was trying to force women to stay in an abusive marriage. It's far from that.

Jesus showed us in this sermon that his heart is all about protecting those who are being left completely unprotected or disregarded for no reason at all. You see, in those days there were two distinct rabbinical schools. One taught by a man called Rabbi Hillel. He taught that a man could divorce his wife for any reason: If she burned his dinner, she gained ten pounds or if he simply got tired of her face he could put her out of his house with no warning and no provision. There was another school of thought led by Rabbi Shammai, another major teacher who said that you could only divorce a wife for a serious offense.

So what Jesus said to the crowd that day is that God values marriage and he cares for women. You can't just divorce your wife apart from adultery. Women had so little value in that culture. There was actually a saying among many rabbis, "Better the torah be burned than read by a woman." What Jesus was saying was that it is wrong to treat women this way. They are to be loved, they're to be protected and cared for.

Then Jesus attacked our basic instinct for justice. In the old law the rule was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It was called the *lex talionis* or the law of retaliation. It was supposed to protect the innocent and make sure that retaliation did not exceed the original offense. So if I accidentally ran over your dog, you could kill my dog but not my cat and my pig and my hamster too.

But Jesus said, "No. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek turn to him the other also."

Can you imagine the reaction to that in the crowd that day? Jesus was telling the crowd to surrender their rights. This kingdom of God is revolutionary and he was introducing a radical truth that affects you and me today -- a whole new way to live. He was saying trust God. Let God be your defender.

Peter took this up and his first letter referring to Jesus in First Peter Chapter 2, verse 23, he wrote this: He did not retaliate when he was insulted nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God who always judges fairly.

After teaching about turning the other cheek, Jesus went on to call the religious leaders "hypocrites." Now hypocrite was a term that people knew. It translates as one who plays a part. It was a name given to the Greek actors of the day. So can you imagine how angry that made the Pharisees? They took such pride in the *appearance* of godliness. But Jesus was saying, "Listen, it is just an act. It is just a mask. God knows your heart."

Put yourself on the hillside that day. You're there because you've heard talk about this man, this teacher and you want to hear what he has to say because you're tired being oppressed by the Pharisees, by the Romans. You're tired of ridiculous taxes. You're tired and you want to honor God by the way you live and the choices you make but the bottom line is it's really hard trying to keep all the laws, the principles and practices.

Honestly, I wonder, if it is that much different today. I imagine you tune in and you join us here on *LIFE Today* and it is your heart that you really want to honor God and do the right thing. But you think, Lord, I'm never going to get it right. You know when you actually dive into what that promise to ask, seek, knock really means, what Jesus was saying, the actual words in the Greek are strong. It's not a little ask, it is a pleading. It is not a little seeking, it is like doing nothing other than that's my mission. And the knocking is the kind of word that you would use to knock down a door.

So Jesus was saying, "Listen. Come on! Run to God. Don't ever give up. Whatever you're asking for, ask and ask and keep asking. Whatever you're seeking for, make it the absolute goal of your life. And if you need God to answer a prayer knock and knock and knock on heaven's door because your Father cares."

Sometimes I think back to that night with Christian and Chase and them ordering pizza and thinking it was a big deal when actually they could have ordered something a lot greater. Sometimes I wonder if it is true of us too. That we ask for little things when God has everything for us.

I hope you know, not just in your head, I hope you know in your heart that God is for you. So often we think, I get up in the morning and I promise I'm going to do my Bible study, I'm going to spend some time with God and by the time you take care of the kids and do the laundry and do the dishes and everything else, suddenly it is evening again and you think, I failed one more time. Do you know that God never looks at you and thinks, what a failure? He looks at you and sees you're tired, sees you're trying to do your best. Sometimes we think, I have to get it right before I come back to God. No! The more you feel you've messed up, the faster you run home. Your Father is waiting. Not with a list of rules to keep.

Remember what Jesus said on the cross? He said, "It is finished. Bill paid in full." Imagine you're going to court and you've been charged that you owe a million dollars and you look at your bank account, you've got like \$60 and you're heading to court and you know that you can't pay it so you know you're going to jail. And you walk into that courtroom and even as you approach the bench the judge looks at you said, "Oh, bill paid in full. Somebody paid for you." That's the beautiful truth of the gospel. Christ has already paid for everything. As we get to come and we ask for what's on our heart, we seek to know him more, and we knock on the door because your Father is always waiting.

Even as I think and reflect on that glorious promise, I think of some people I met on a trip not so long ago. I had the privilege of going and working with some of our partners in Angola, Africa and there I saw some mums who were desperately asking, desperately seeking, desperately knocking, praying that someone will listen to them because their needs are very, very real. Watch this.

On the mission field

Announcer: If you've ever missed a meal or two you probably know the feeling of hunger pains and the relief that your next meal brings. But sadly, there are those who live with the pain of hunger every single day of their life. And then there are children who do not survive once they move beyond the pain of hunger. Veronica is reminded of her little brother dying from a lack of food every day that she has to go without food.

>> I remember when my brother died. We were hungry and he was so thin. My mom took him to the clinic that was very far away and he died on the way there.

Announcer: Veronica's story is all too common in villages throughout southern Africa and that's what makes this so urgent that we do something now.

Sheila: Some of these moms have to walk 10-15 kilometers with a seriously malnourished baby just to try and get some help. And if they can get here in time, then there is some hope.

But time is everything here as you can see.

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: Honestly, nothing -- nothing prepares you from walking into a malnutrition clinic. Our crew who had been before tried to kind of fill me in a little bit as we were driving there but nothing -- nothing prepares you for seeing these little ones who are literally, the skin is peeling off of their body, their hair has turned red because there is no protein in their system. I think the thing that was almost the saddest for me were the children who didn't even have the energy to cry. I held one little one who literally it was everything this little one could do to take one breath.

The thing that is so urgent in my spirit is that this is something we can do something about. Sometimes you hear of situations where there is nothing that can be done, it is beyond help. This is not that situation. When we are able to get into those villages and set up a feeding program, literally, the first bowl of food put into the hands of a child begins to reverse the cycle from death to life.

I've been in these malnutrition clinics. I've wept with mothers. One mum while we were there, she had just left it too late and by the time her little one came and they tried to wrap the little one up in tin foil because they didn't have an incubator, it was just too late and she's already buried a child.

But I've also been to the villages where we have feeding programs in place and there you hear what you're supposed to hear -- children laughing.

Here's the deal. You and I, we are the body of Christ. When you think about it, half of us are on diets because we eat too much. And all these children are asking for is one meal a day. So here's what we can do and we can do it now and we can do it together: \$30 will feed three children. \$50 will feed five children. If you can do \$100, that's amazing -- it will feed ten children for three months! \$1,000 will feed 100 children for three months.

Think how easy it is to just spend \$30 in the mall and not think anything of it. But can you imagine what it means to these moms and these children to be able to know that their children are going to go to bed with a full tummy, perhaps for the first time in months? You and I can

change this in Jesus' name. Please go to your phones now.

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

James: No way for me to tell you how grateful I am to see these bags of food; I'm told over 70,000 meals on this one load. Betty and I started out really helping Peter feed 10,000 children. Now we're approaching nearly a half million.

I just say thank God because I've seen so many things happen. Children that were dying are now being fed and going to school.

It's all because of the food factory. It's all because of mission feeding and mission feeding is all because of you.

I'm saying to you right here from a miracle in Africa, you are the reason for the miracle. To God be the glory but it is God's love being expressed through you and you are glorifying God by your action and by your gifts. Thank you for helping. Let's keep doing it.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much. I just want to remind you this is the last week of Mission Feeding. We never want the line to be longer than the bowls of food we have. So please go to your phone and make the best gift possible and we'll be happy to send you *The Shelter of God's Promises*. And for \$1400 you can sponsor an entire school, perhaps potentially change the nation for Jesus.

I'm Sheila Walsh. God bless you! See you next time!