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Week 33: WFL
Wednesdays in the Word
Sheila Walsh
The Storm Inside: From Fear to Joy

Sheila: Hello! I'm Sheila Walsh. I want to welcome you to *Wednesdays in the Word*. Thanks for always stopping by. If you're watching this on your computer later, then it's good to see you too. I think it is such a privilege, I don't take this for granted, to be able to open the word of God because this is not just some dull book of rules. This is a living, it is alive, it is a love letter from God to you and me to help us deal not with what happened 4,000 years ago or 2,000 years ago, but to help us deal with what is going on in life right at this moment.

One of the things I've heard many of you drop little notes to me about and I've heard your concern is dealing with fear. How do you help your kids live and not be afraid with some of the things that are going on in this world? So that's what I want us to look at today. I want to look at moving from fear but moving to joy.

I believe that every promise that Christ gives us is rock solid. But sometimes it is hard to hold onto the truth of the promise. In one hand we know God has said this, therefore it's true. But then we look at what is going on in the world and some of the harsh realities make it hard to bring those two things together. You've seen it on the news. Terrible things happen to innocent people. Violence erupting at a concert and children being injured or tourists in Times Square, whatever the latest thing, it seems every day there is something new happening.

You might categorize what you deal with. Maybe you'd say, "Well, it's not so much fear I deal with but I deal with anxiety. I find that my day is kind of consumed by the 'what if's' of life." The circumstances change but the constant reality is this: Fear absolutely robs us of joy. We can't live in the "what is" of what God has gifted us with because we're so aware of what might be, what might happen to my kids, what might happen.

So my question for us today is this, why is it that so many of us who love God are still really dominated by fear?

When we turn to the word of God, I can't think of another life that is so profoundly understood the depths of fear and then the overwhelming crashing waves of joy than Mary Magdalene. If you think about it, Mary Magdalene understood the power and brutality of the enemy like very

few other people. She had been possessed by seven demons; that's how Luke described her in his gospel. Let me read how he describes her former life. You read this in Luke chapter eight.

It says this: Soon after Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the good news about the kingdom of God. He took the 12 disciples with him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene from whom he had cast out seven demons.

What we do know about her life is until the moment when she came face to face with Christ she was a brutally miserable tormented soul. Mary understood the depth and depravity that can infest, paralyze, and torment the human heart. I can't even begin to imagine what it must be like to live possessed by such evil.

Demon possession can only occur in the lives of those who don't know Christ in his indwelling spirit but even those of us who follow Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit are not immune from being oppressed, from being attacked. When Paul writes the church in Ephesus, he is very firm in his mandate.

Remember Ephesians six: A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh and blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

Every single day of our lives we have an enemy who wants nothing more than to cause God's children to fall. There's a battle raging over you and I far more intense than any battle we can see with our eyes.

So yeah, it would be easy to give in to fear but Paul encourages us to be aware of the enemy. And not just that. To put on the full armor of God. Do you remember every piece of that? Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth, and the body armor of God's righteousness -- some call it the breastplate. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the good news so that you'll be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

We can stand strong because we have not been left defenseless. But for Mary though, before she was delivered by Christ, life must have been a nightmare. Luke writes that Mary was possessed by seven demons. The number seven in scripture is highly significant. It occurs actually over 287 times. In the Hebrew, the number seven is sheba and it is from the root seba which means to be

full, to be satisfied, to be complete. The number seven is used over and over throughout scriptures to speak of completion.

So to say that Mary Magdalene had been possessed by seven demons was to say the possession of this poor woman was total. I read one commentator; he said, "It was a possession of extraordinary malignancy. We don't know how long she'd lived like this before her encounter with Christ but her existence must have been torturous.

If you read through all the gospel accounts, you can make a list of everyone who came to Jesus for help. Friends carried one man. Others cried out from the side of the road or traveled for miles to ask Jesus to help them. But not the demon possessed; they didn't come to Christ for help. In fact, they avoided Christ at all costs because the demons knew who Jesus was and held the tormented back. The one who was possessed was unable to make their way to Christ but here is the profound beauty of the gospel, Christ came to them.

Do you remember the account we read in chapter five of Mark's gospel of another very tormented soul? Christ takes the disciples across the Sea of Galilee through a terrible storm to save one man, who like Mary is possessed by demons. It is a fascinating account of what happens when evil, no matter how pervasive encounters Christ.

Mark tells us while Jesus was still some distance away the man saw him, ran to meet him and bowed low before him. With a shriek he screamed, "Why are you interfering with me, Jesus, son of the most high God? In the name of God, I beg you don't torture me." For Jesus had already said to the spirit, "Come out of the man, you evil spirit." Then Jesus demanded, "What is your name?" And he replied, "My name is Legion because there are many of us inside this man."

Wow! Why did this man run to Christ? He didn't know who Jesus was but the demons did. The moment that Christ set foot on the shore, the demons who had been tormenting this man recoiled in fear and for a moment this poor man felt the possibility of freedom and he ran and he fell at Jesus' feet. Then Christ addressed the demonic hordes and commanded them to leave.

Do you see a picture here of the outrageous mercy and love of God that would drive him to cross the sea all night for one poor man who had never even heard of him? Once Christ had set the man free he got back in the boat and left. The sole purpose of that all night boat trip was for one man.

Do you worry about a loved one who seems too far away from the love of God? Don't be afraid. God knows where they are right at this moment. And his love will go to any lengths to set them free. God's word makes it clear, there is no darkness too dark for Christ. There is no ocean too deep or prison too far from his mercy.

Do you remember what Paul wrote in that glorious chapter in his writings to the church in Rome? I love this. From Romans chapter eight: I'm convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love, neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow, not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or on the earth below -- indeed nothing -- nothing -- nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that's revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What a promise! There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. In his great mercy, God's love propels him to what must seem to us like ridiculous lengths to rescue one -- one tormented person, even when they don't have the presence of mind to ask for help.

One of the things we know about Mary is that once Christ had delivered her, her devotion to him was total. It's clear that all four gospel writers hold her in very high esteem. She's mentioned more often than any other woman apart from Mary, the mother of Christ. She was obviously a woman who was financially independent and she is mentioned among others, those who traveled with Christ and underwrote his ministry.

When women are listed in the four gospels, Mary Magdalene is almost always listed first, a clear indication of the leadership role that she possessed. I love that scripture records the fact that it wasn't only the 12 men who were part of Christ's circle but there we were too. There were women there as well. She was given the gift of being a part of the chosen few that saw Christ live out kingdom life day after day.

It would seem to me that Mary's relationship with Jesus would be different than anyone else who walked this earth with him. Mary peculiarly knew the darkness is no match for Christ's light. She had tasted the worst that any broken soul can experience and she knew that with one word from Christ all the evil that had plagued her for years had to leave. She knew, as few did, that fear -- fear is no match for the power of Christ.

But I wonder if Mary had to face fear a second time. When all the men abandoned Christ on the night when he was betrayed, Mary did not. Mary Magdalene was there at the cross with Jesus' mother. I've often wondered what those hours were like for her. There was no shadow of doubt in her mind that the one being brutally crucified was Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. She listened as Christ cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

I can't imagine the agony she must have suffered because you see here's a missing piece for Mary. Mary knew the master but she didn't know the master plan. So often that's why fear

overwhelms us because we forget that no matter how things appear, God is still in control.

Mary had to watch Christ suffer a dark death that no other human being will ever face as he took on all the sin of this world. She heard that cry of desolation and it must have torn her heart in two -- but she stayed. Mary was there. She watched it all. She didn't walk away. She stayed until Jesus took his last breath.

You might remember Joseph of Arimathea who was a respected member of the Jewish council stepped up and boldly went to Pilate to ask for the body of Christ. He and Nicodemus took Christ's body down from the cross. They wrapped it in linen, and carried it to Joseph's tomb and Mary Magdalene followed them. The night was falling and Jewish law prevented any work being done on the Sabbath so Mary needed to know where they'd place Christ's body so she could return after the Sabbath and make insure it was properly taken care of.

Matthew tells us that Mary sat and watched as a huge stone was rolled into place sealing the tomb. Then Nicodemus and Joseph disappeared into the night. There was nothing more that Mary could do other than go home and prepare the spices and perfumes that she would bring back in the morning after Sabbath to anoint the broken, bloody body of Christ.

I wonder if the voices threatened her that night. All I know, she'd watched the one who had rescued her from the pit of hell be brutally murdered and his body was placed in a borrowed tomb.

Before dawn broke, when it was still dark, Mary made her way back to the tomb. How did she think she was going to be able to roll such a heavy piece of stone out of its groove? You might remember Pilate, the one who had authorized Christ's execution, afraid of the power and influence of Christ and his followers had ordered that guards should be placed at the entrance to the tomb to insure that no one would come in the night and steal Christ's body and then declare that Christ had indeed risen from the dead.

But when Mary got to the tomb that morning, the stone had already been moved from the entrance. Well, Mary, I'm sure she panicked. Her first thought was to run and find Peter and tell him what happened. John records the events of that morning in Chapter 20 of his gospel. Peter and John, despite everything that Christ told them, didn't quite understand what they saw. They looked inside the empty tomb and saw the linen clothes that Christ's body had been wrapped in. No grave robber would have taken time to unwrap a body. We read that Peter marveled at what he saw. He went home trying to imagine what might have happened that night.

But Mary didn't leave. She stayed. This loss, this empty tomb was more than Mary could take. She had stayed to the bitter end and watched as Christ's life seeped out of him. She had followed

Joseph to the garden tomb, waiting until she could finally do this one last thing for the one who changed everything for her and now his body was gone.

She made her way into the tomb and saw something that nothing could have prepared her for: Two angels startling brilliant in white were sitting where Christ's body had been laid, one where his head had been and one at his feet. They asked Mary a question, what might seem strange but it is the perfect question. And it is a question that changes everything for Mary. It changes everything for you and me. "Dear woman, why are you weeping?"

Did Mary think, where have you been? Don't you know what happened to Jesus? Of course she was weeping. Let's think about it. If Jesus' body had been there she should have been weeping. The glorious game-changing news was that Christ was not there, his body was not there -- he is risen!

Well, Mary turned to the entrance of the tomb and she saw a figure standing in the early morning light. She didn't recognize it was Jesus and he asked her the same question, "Why are you weeping?"

Then he asked her another game-changing question, "Who are you looking for?"

What a question! When everything else in your life falls apart, when nothing makes sense anymore, who are you looking for? When fear threatens to take over, when you're overwhelmed, who are you looking for? When you get an unexpected result at the doctor's office, who are you looking for? When you can't pay your bills, who are you looking for?

Well, Mary doesn't understand the question and mistaking him for a gardener she asks has he taken the body of Jesus somewhere else? Then Jesus speaks her name, "Mary." In that moment dawn really breaks for Mary and she understands that this is Jesus who is standing before her. This is the pivotal moment in human history.

Many religions have watched their leaders die but Jesus is the only one who rose from the dead. In many ways it is outrageous that Mary was the first to witness the resurrected Christ. In those days, do you know a woman was not considered a reliable witness? She could never be used to give testimony in a court. If Jesus had chosen to, he could have revealed himself a few moments earlier to Peter and to John, two men whose words would have carried weight. But chose Jesus Mary Magdalene, the first one to see that death has lost its power. The one who had been held in hell's merciless clutches for years saw the chains ripped from its grip and Christ standing there before her having defeated Satan and death and hell forever. Mary was the first to see our dawn break.

No matter how many battles you lose on this earth, I want you to remember, we win this one. Our victory is sealed in the blood of Christ. I pray that brings you hope and joy today. I pray that as you remember that he is risen that joy would push fear out.

One of the things that gives me incredible, real, deep down lasting joy in this ministry is I get to see Christ change lives over and over in nations where perhaps you'll never get a chance to set foot but do you want to see the difference that you and I can make? Watch this.

On the mission field

Announcer: The countries change, the landscape changes, and the faces may change. But one thing that does not change is the hopelessness that people feel when they have no other choice but to give their families water to drink from unsafe sources.

[Subtitles]

Joseph: We've been drinking this water for 5 years now and it has killed my 2 kids that I treasured so much. Other children are dying in our community.

Announcer: this expression of despair is too common among the precious people our mission teams visit, people who have never known what it is like to take a drink of fresh, clean water.

[Subtitles]

Muriko: This is the water that killed my child. How can my other children have a good life with this water?

Announcer: Generation after generations have suffered from unsafe drinking water in villages just like Muriko's. Hopelessness pervades the very fabric of her village. But because of love, our mission teams are able to offer hope through prayer and a promise that we will try and do all we can to provide them with fresh water. But the only way we can do that is for those who hear their plight, determine to offer them not only hope but fresh water by helping drill a water well.

Tammy: Gosh, it would be amazing if one day we were walking together and I was carrying clean water for you in a bucket. That would be my hope and my prayer. One day. There is hope. I promise you, there is hope.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: I realize there was so much I didn't understand about so many of these villages, so

many of these countries where they simply don't have access to clean water. I didn't realize how far these children have to walk every day. Some of them have to walk for miles. Some of these children never get to go to school because their job is to simply walk for miles to get water and to walk for miles and bring it back.

The other thing I didn't realize was how dangerous it is in some of these places. Some of these places where children have to go, it is very exposed and we've heard terrible stories of children who had been attacked and killed by wild animals.

If I think of how much you and I take for granted, every morning when I wake up, I just turn the faucet on to brush my teeth. I don't think about it. And yet I think of the number of moms who go to bed each night praying that someone will hear their heart cry and their prayer because what they want for their children is not the latest sneakers or the latest kind of iPhone, it is simply to be able to provide for their children clean water.

I've watched as some of those children in villages where we haven't been able to put a well yet, lift this water to their lips and everything within me wants to stop them but I realize they've got no choice. They drink nothing -- and there is no death more painful than dying of that terrible dehydration -- or they have to drink this dirty water knowing that there is a chance that they will contract some terrible disease and lose their life.

No mother should have to worry about things like that. We pray for our children. We pray that they will do well in school and do well in college and make good choices in their life. Those are normal prayers. Moms shouldn't have to go to bed at night, dads shouldn't have to go to bed at night, soaking what little pillow they have praying that someone will hear their cry and send clean water.

Well, we've heard the cry and not only that we've realized how doable it is. How easily we can meet this need. For example, if you were able to give just \$48, do you know that that would provide clean water for ten people! If you were able to give a little bit more, say, \$144, that would provide clean water for 30 people!

And if you are one of the blessed people who are able to actually put a well in, \$4800, and you know that provides enough clean water for a 1,000 people? And it's literally Water for LIFE; not only does it give them life but it lasts for the life of the village. That well will last for like 70 years.

So please, will you join with us and give your best gift possible? Would you go to your phones? Would you dial that number on the screen or go online? But if each of us do something now then we're able to go back and bring you the stories of the changed lives because

these children are able to grow up and be healthy and go to school. Who knows that God would raise up a leader among those children to change their nations for Christ? Would you call now?

Begin video clip

Announcer: Every day children living in extreme poverty are forced to make a dreadful choice: Drink polluted water filled with deadly disease or perhaps die of thirst. No child should ever be faced with this decision.

The good news is there is a solution. **Mission:** Water for Life is one of the most proven and viable demonstrations of God's love in the world today. Suffering can end because clean water changes everything!

With your gift today you can help drill 400 water wells in remote villages in 15 nations. A gift of \$48 will provide disease-free water for ten people, \$72 will provide for 15 people, and \$144 will help provide clean water straight from the ground for 30 people.

Please also consider an additional gift of \$100 to help provide three families with water filtration kits in emergency areas where our drilling rigs are unable to reach. As our thank you, we'll send you the books, *Words of Jesus* and *Words of Healing*. One contains only the words of Jesus and the other scriptures for healing in your body, mind, and soul. With your \$100 gift you can receive both hardbound and softbound editions of these scripture promise books.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people. Or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well and you may request our beautiful hand sculpted "Determined Eagle" bronze. Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much! I wanted to tell you too, if you're able to give an extra \$100 we have these amazing filter kits where we can take them to villages where we're not able to have access and they pour this water through this filter kit. They say it's almost like dialysis. It comes out so crystal clear! And that will provide water for three families. So just for an extra \$100 that will make such a difference.

I just want to thank you so much for being with us and we'd love to send you *The Storm Inside*

DVD. We've got lots of lovely gifts that we would love to give you. I know you don't do it for that but it is just our way of saying thank you.

Remember, if you need us we're here for you too. I'm Sheila Walsh saying thank you so much for being with us on *Wednesdays in the Word*. We'll see you next time.