

8/30/17

Week 36: Christmas Shoes & Smiles
***Wednesdays in the Word:* Sheila Walsh**
The Storm Inside: Heartache to Strength

Sheila: Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. I'm Sheila Walsh. I'm so glad that you're stopping by for this time together.

You might remember earlier this year there was that terrible, terrible tragedy in London where an entire story of apartments just went up in flames. I have a friend who works with Christian radio in London, with Premier Radio and she said that it was one of the most heartbreaking things that she's ever seen. We had some coverage of it over here but I think it was really different to be there. One of her closest friends lived in the apartment building next to it and stood there helplessly watching the unthinkable happen.

I think there are situations in life that really -- heartbreaking is the right word because you think, Lord, how do I even recover from something like this? I was thinking today, I'm praying before we went on the air with this show about those of you who perhaps are just casually flipping through channels and you just happen to stop here and you think, who is that woman with the funny accent? But I think nothing -- I don't believe anything happens by accident. I personally believe in a sovereign God who loves us. And perhaps today, that's something that you need to hear, that God sees you, that he knows what's going on in your life. And if you are facing heartbreak, that he cares.

As a culture we totally over use the word heartbroken. We use it in sentimental chick flicks and daytime television dramas or actually, I used it when my team didn't make it to the Super Bowl. We bandy that word around a lot. But despite its overuse the word *heartbroken* at its root speaks to unimaginable loss.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines heartbreak as overcome by sorrow. Overcome, that's a weighty word. It speaks to those times when we feel out of control. And nobody, none of us likes that feeling. We want to be able to impact the outcome of any situation, to do something to help. But there are times in life when there's absolutely nothing we can do, at least nothing that feels like it is enough. And that's where sorrow comes in. We feel heartbroken because we can't change the situation.

Honestly, the Bible -- I don't know if you read the Bible much but the Bible is brutally honest

about the reality of heartbreak. This is one of my favorite verses: My heart is troubled and restless. Days of suffering torment me. I walk in gloom without sunlight. I stand in the public square and cry for help.

You might be thinking, why on earth would that be one of your favorite verses? I love the fact that the Bible is honest about the fact that there are times when you just think, God, where are you?

Another verse: O God, my rock I cry, why have you forgotten me? Why must I wander around in grief oppressed by my enemies? Their taunts break my bones. They scoff, "Where is this God of yours?"

Listen to this quote from one of my favorite authors, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. He says this: "Perhaps this is what the stories meant when they called somebody heartsick. Your heart and your stomach, your whole insides felt empty and hollow and aching."

I wonder if you've ever felt like that before. I know I have. Today we're going to look at a woman who experienced tremendous heartbreak. But we're going to see that she found strength by knowing where to take her pain, by surrendering that heartbreak to God.

For a woman, the inability to have children is one of the most profound, primal heartaches there is. Just ask Hannah, that's who we are going to look at. Hannah's story is found in First Samuel. When we're first introduced to her this is how she is described. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children but Hannah did not.

That's how Hannah was known to her entire community. That is a devastating reality in our time but in Hannah's time it totally defined who a woman was because barrenness was seen as a curse and a sign of God's displeasure. Not only that, there would be huge family pressure to produce a son, an heir to carry on the family name. Elkanah was the fifth generation of a very strong family who are counting on Hannah to deliver the sixth generation.

Carrying on the family name was so crucial in those days that Moses had instructed what was known as Levirate Law. This law stated that if a man died and had produced no heir, his brother had to marry his sister-in-law and produce a son who would preserve the dead brother's name.

With no male heir, a woman in those days had little worth. Every time she would be at family gathering or walking in the market, she wore that label "childless" like a neon sign around her neck. The one thing that she longed to give her husband, she couldn't. Not only that, but for Hannah, somebody else could, Peninnah, Elkanah's other wife could and she did.

We read in First Samuel that Hannah lived in evil days where most people gave little thought to the laws that God had given to Moses for the children of Israel. Polygamy, having more than one wife had become acceptable in their time. As we read, Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. It is likely that Hannah was the first wife but after years of producing no heir Elkanah married again. Now his new wife was very fertile. She was able to give birth to many children, boys and girls. But she was also a very cruel woman. Rather than comforting and supporting Hannah, she simply added to her pain and harassment went on for years.

This is what we read: So Peninnah would taunt Hannah and make fun of her because the Lord had kept her from having children. Year after year it was the same, Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the tabernacle. And each time Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat.

How cruel! Can you imagine what that must have felt like? Rather than share her children with Hannah and try to ease, try to lift some of her burden she used the very gifts of God to add to Hannah's pain. In addition, this custom of appearing before the Lord three times a year at the main place of worship, remembered God's care for his people during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, it was a time of celebration and joy. So three times a year as all the people celebrated the goodness, the provision of God, Hannah was there with empty arms and a broken heart.

Heartache comes in many forms. For you, perhaps it is the loss of a marriage. Or the reality that time is ticking on and there is no Prince Charming or if you're a guy, no Belle in the wings. It may be your health. Or the child you raised in the church now wants nothing to do with God. The unpacking of heartache is different for every one of us but at some point in our lives it is delivered to every one of our doors.

What I find challenging and beautiful about Hannah's life is that even though her heart was broken, although she felt she had failed as a woman, despite the relentless taunting of another, her faith in God remained intact. So what was Hannah's secret? Very simple and yet profound: She knew where to take her pain.

We read this. Hannah was in deep anguish crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. And she made this vow, "O Lord of heaven's armies. If you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime."

This was not the first time Hannah had prayed this prayer. I'm sure she'd poured out her soul to God for years and years. But even when God seemed silent, she continued to take her heartache to him.

As you read her prayers, it might read to you that Hannah is trying to make a deal with God. I don't think so. I think Hannah was making a vow. She had come to a place inside of her soul and spirit where she was ready to surrender what mattered most to her -- what mattered most in life -- and in that place worshipping in the darkness, Hannah found strength and peace.

Imagine taking your biggest heartache, your most treasured dream and surrendering it to your heavenly Father. Very hard to do. But for Hannah, it changed everything.

So while she is praying, the priest Eli saw Hannah praying. But at first he misunderstood what she was doing. She was praying with such desperation that although her lips moved, there was no sound coming out of her mouth. So Eli, he thought she was drunk. I think that's such a sign of the times they were living in. It probably had been quite some time since Eli had seen anyone pray with that kind of passion.

When Eli understood his mistake he gave Hannah his blessing. In that case, Eli said, "Go in peace. May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him."

With that, Hannah returned home and became pregnant with a boy. She called him Samuel which means name of God or offspring of God. When he was about three or four years old, Hannah fulfilled her vow to God and brought her son Samuel to Eli to serve God for the rest of his life. She didn't just do it, she did it with joy. Hard to imagine.

All Hannah had ever wanted was a son and now she's had this beautiful boy and she's had him for three or four years. Imagine for a moment how she must have felt being granted her heart's desire for a son and then knowing that the vow she had made to God had to be kept.

Well, what you might not know is this. Hannah legally had a way to get out of her vow. All she needed to do was ask her husband who adored her to refuse to accept the vow she had made and she was home free. Not only home free but forgiven by God. It was part of the law given to Moses to help govern the people. Here's what it said: If her husband learns of her vow or pledge and does not object on the day he hears of it, her vow and pledges will stand. But if her husband refuses to accept her vow or impulsive pledge on the day he hears of it, he nullifies her commitments and the Lord will forgive her.

Hannah had a way out. She did not have to follow through. Why did she make a conscious decision to honor that vow she had made to God? Well, she's the one who can best answer that question.

Here's what Hannah said, "I asked the Lord to give me this boy and he's granted my request.

Now I'm giving him to the Lord and he will belong to the Lord his whole life." And they worshipped the Lord there. Then Hannah prayed, "My heart rejoices in the Lord. The Lord has made me strong. Now I have an answer for my enemies. I rejoice because you rescued me."

Wow! What Hannah had discovered was the joy of surrender even in her deepest heartache. Hannah had discovered in the darkness one of the greatest acts of worship a man or a woman could ever bring to God is to surrender to him. It's easy to worship when the sun is shining brightly. It is such a gift to God when we worship in the darkness. When we honestly have come to a place where we desire God himself more than anything he could do for us or give us, it's the greatest gift we could ever give him.

I don't know what heartache you're facing right now but I wonder if you, if I, if we could follow in our sister's footsteps and worship God even when life makes no sense. Worshipping God in the sunshine lifts our spirits. Worshipping God through the longest night changes who we are.

You might think, well, that's easy for you to say. No, honestly, it is not. I've been through some really dark places, places where I wondered how on earth are we going to get through this? Times when I thought, God, have you forgotten where we live? Have you forgotten what is not in our bank account? Times when I've had to let go of dreams. And the thing is, there is a difference -- there is a different relationship. When you're in a relationship with God where it is like, God, if you love me, would you do this? Would you do that? Would you clear this? Would you clear that? It's almost as if we're treating God as just almost as if he is our command? Whatever we think we need, whatever we think we want that it would just be God's delight to do it.

Now the interesting, subtle thing is there is some truth in that. God delights to give good gifts to his children. But in my own life, in these days I feel as if God is calling me to a different place of maturity where it is not this, God, if you love me please do this. It is a place of saying, "God, I want my life to glorify you even when things don't necessarily make sense." I think we get so trapped up in this life. It is like we've got these -- it used to be 70 years and we've got a lot more. But basically, we think, I need to squeeze happiness into this -- and here's what I think happiness will look like.

In reality, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ and let me just say at this point, if you're not, you know he is as close as a simple prayer. If you're watching this and you think, well, you know what? I've gone to church but I don't think I really know this Jesus. God is not interested in religion, he is interested in relationship. If you don't know this Jesus, you can simply ask him. You can simply say, "Lord, I know I'm a sinner. I believe that you died for my sin. Not only that, I believe you rose again from the dead and I want you to be my savior and my Lord." Like that, the Lord says, "Come! Come as you are! You're welcome." And you begin a relationship.

What I'm discovering, I gave my life to Christ when I was 11 and I turn 61 this year. But what I want now is not that God would do things for me, I want God to be glorified through my life.

If you're sitting here right now watching and you're thinking, but what do I do with the pain? I would remind you what Hannah did. Hannah didn't sit and soak in her misery. Hannah knew where to take her pain and that's what she did. She showed up on her knees before God, day after day, week after week, month after month. There is a place to take the sorrow that is too much to bear. And when we do that, then we move as Hannah did from a place of heartbreak to a place of strength in him.

I love the fact that at *LIFE Today* we get to make an impact all around the world. We're going to do something pretty special this Christmas. I'll tell you about a little bit more in a little while but maybe you could just watch this with me.

On the mission field

Ralph: One of the things I've noticed is there are no kids wearing shoes hardly. Almost all of them have no shoes. The terrain here can be really tough, even walking in shoes. But much less barefooted. Jahdu was brought to me here. I saw his feet and you can see the toll that it's taken with him not wearing shoes probably most of his life, if not all of his life. You know the solution to these hardships is a simple pair of shoes.

Tammy: You think it is just a pair of shoes but it is so much more than that. What this represents is so much more. It could save and spare his very life. Think about it. Even a little cut that he could get on his foot, stepping then into a bad source of water and infect it.

And so what do we do about it? A simple pair of shoes that really costs very, very little can change a life one child at a time. These little ones are in desperate need. They were so excited walking into this room thinking I get a new pair of shoes.

Ralph: You can be a blessing today by giving a child like Jahdu his very first pair of shoes. So please partner with us to provide Jahdu and children just like him all around the world with a brand-new pair of shoes this Christmas season.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Isn't that awesome? You may be thinking, why are you talking to me about Christmas already? It is a little bit early. Well, that's very intentional because we want to know how much we have in. We really want to provide 150,000 pairs of these little shoes. So we need to be able to get them ordered and sent off so they will be there for Christmas.

They're amazing. And they cost too little. They're darling little shoes and they last a long, long time. I had the privilege too, when we were in Angola, of actually putting a pair of shoes on to a little boy and then also when we were in Southeast Asia, we had this tremendous gift of being able to give shoes to children. And when they've never had a pair of shoes before, they're absolutely blown away.

But do you know that \$36 -- \$36 -- will give ten pairs of these shoes, \$72, 20 pairs, and \$180, 50 pairs of shoes! If you think of the money that we -- if you're like me, waste at Christmastime.

I'm running around the mall like a chicken with my head cut off trying to think, what else can I get? What else can I get my husband? Things they don't really need or necessarily want. We've made a commitment as a family every single year that Christmas shoes will be part of our Christmas. But not only that, my husband and I, we've made a commitment, our gift to each other each Christmas is going to be for one cleft palate surgery.

Children born with that kind of disfiguring thing are often looked at as cursed in their nations and it means they can't eat properly, they can't get a job, they can't take care of themselves sometimes. But for \$500 -- we have amazing doctors who will go and perform that surgery for \$500.

Yay Christmas! When you think about it, Christmas gets real commercialized but what it is actually about is that God looked down on us and said, "Oh you're walking in some places that are going to hurt your feet" and so God himself took on a shoe size to let us know how much he loved us. And now because we're his we want to do the same for some children around the world who as Tammy said, you can get a cut and then you can get hook worm and that goes into their brains and causes brain damage. One little pair of shoes can make so much difference in their lives.

So together, let's make this the best Christmas ever. Not only because you and I don't have to take 53 things back to the mall but that we can sit around with our family and celebrate the fact that we've had the privilege of giving gifts to people that maybe we'll never see on this earth but hopefully, we'll see them around the throne when we all see Jesus face to face.

So please, let's do this. Will you go to your phone? Will you dial that number on your screen and make the best gift possible? We have some darling little gifts for you and we'll tell you

about those. I think you're going to love them.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Poverty is a killer and because of it children needlessly suffer; not only from a lack of food and clean water but also from a lack of things we take for granted such as a healthy smile or a simple pair of shoes.

Far too many children living in poverty have never owned a new pair of shoes. And while that may seem minor in light of all their needs, walking with bare feet puts them at risk of life-threatening infections and disease that could lead to crippling consequences -- and even death.

By responding today you can help immediately secure and begin shipping Christmas shoes to 150,000 children around the world just in time for the holidays. Your gift of \$36 will help provide ten pairs of shoes. A gift of \$72 will help provide 20 pairs. And the gift of \$180 will help provide 50 pairs of Christmas shoes for children in need.

With your gift of any amount, be sure to request this beautifully crafted crystal shoe ornament, a treasure to place on your tree each holiday season. With your gift of \$180 or more you may also request this keepsake boxed set of LIFE's Christmas shoe ornaments.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help provide over 275 pairs of shoes or two children with corrective cleft palate surgeries and you may request our determined eagle bronze sculpture. Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of clip

On the mission field

Sheila: It's been quite an amazing year. Through your help we've been able to feed thousands and thousands of children. We've been able to put water wells in villages. And also, a new venture, you probably remember, for the first time we've been able to work with children who have club foot. You've helped us change the lives of children all around the world.

At Christmastime, I know you think of your kids and you want to do something really special for them. Well, I also know you want to do something really special for children like these. If you look at this darling little one here in Angola, he is like every other little boy or girl I've seen, he has no shoes. We felt, wouldn't it be cool to be able to let every boy and girl have their very own

pair of shoes? Not just because it will save them from cutting their feet when they run but so many diseases in these countries come through injuries to the foot, like hook worm comes through the foot.

So what a wonderful thing to do in this season to see the little ones like this little darling boy in Angola, hey! You're going to have your very own pair of shoes. So on behalf of my little brother, may I simply say, obrigada.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much for calling. If you haven't called yet, please call now. What a joy to be able to put a smile on a child this Christmas -- maybe for the very first time. And to put shoes on little feet to let people know, God loved us so much that he came so that we could have life.

I want to thank you so much for joining us every Wednesday. It is a real privilege. Remember, if you need help, if you're in a rough place, we're here for you too. If any of you prayed a prayer with me today, perhaps for the first time, asking Christ to be real to you, and become your savior, then tell somebody. Call us and tell one of us. Find a great church. Pick up the word of God; it's a love letter from God to you. See you next time.