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Week 37: Christmas Shoes & Smiles
Wednesdays in the Word: Sheila Walsh
The Storm Inside: "From Despair to Faith"

In the Studio:

Sheila: Hi! Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. I'm Sheila Walsh. Thanks so much for being with me here today.

I have a very dear friend who never got married but still had this overwhelming desire to be a mom. So she decided to go through everything she had to do to adopt a child. I don't know if you've ever tried that but it is a really long and very costly process.

Then eventually she was connected with a mom and got very, very involved with the mom, a young girl and really walked side by side with her the whole almost nine months of her pregnancy. And my friend couldn't wait to bring this little one home. And literally, at the last moment this young girl changed her mind. I think the only word I can use to describe what was going on in my friend's heart was just despair. What can you do? She was already so invested in the life of this young mom but also in this baby that she believed was going to be hers.

And I think despair is something that at some point visits most of us. So I want today to look at what does it mean to be able to move from despair to faith?

Maybe you say well, despair, that's not a word we use a lot these days. Perhaps the word you're more familiar with is desperate. Have you ever been in a place where you're desperate for something to happen? If you're a Christian, maybe you've been praying and asking God to move and it seems like nothing is happening. And in those times it is hard to have faith because you think, well, what else am I supposed to do?

I want us to look at the root, what is the word *despair* actually mean? Webster defines despair in three ways. The first two are pretty familiar but it is the third definition that speaks not only of hopelessness, which is an element of despair, but takes it to an even darker place. The third definition he gives is: Losing hope in the mercy of God. Personally, I can't think of a darker place to be than that -- to lose hope in the mercy of God.

So the person that I chose to help us see how it is possible to move from that kind of darkness to a

real living faith, not a pretend but a real living faith is Sarah. Remember Abram and Sarah? We first meet her in Genesis. But actually, she is one of only two women mentioned in the great faith chapter in the book of Hebrews, Hebrews Chapter 11. And we read that she had faith and believed God. The reason I chose her is because her journey actually began in despair.

There is so much more to Sarah's story than that she had faith and believed God. I love that she is remembered that way as one of two women in the famous Hall of Faith. But I think it will be helpful to take another look at the rest of her story because trust me, she didn't get into Hebrews 11 overnight. If being a woman of faith means that we never waver, we never doubt, Sarah wouldn't even have been in the running for the title.

So let me remind you a few things from Sarah's story. We learn a very important detail about her life in Genesis Chapter 11. We read that she is Abram's wife but we read that Sarah was unable to become pregnant and had no children. That's how she was defined. She was Abram's wife and she had no children. As we've looked at before, this was a disaster for a woman in those times. She knew the kind of despair that Webster described, loss of hope in the mercy of God toward her. Children were seen as a sign of blessing so to be without them was in effect to be under the curse of God.

On first readthrough of Sarah's story, it would be easy to conclude that God cared more about Abram than he did about her. In Genesis 17 we read, when God is making his covenant he says to Abram: "My covenant is with you and you will be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall you be called Abram but your name shall be Abraham for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you."

Now obviously, I'm emphasizing there but you notice how many times God uses the word *you* -- not you and Sarah -- just you. If you're thinking well, that's no big deal. Obviously God meant them both, after all, she was his wife. I would say well, yeah, true. But do you remember that at this point in their lives Abram is 75 and Sarah is 65? How would any 65-year old woman who is never been able to conceive in her life think that she could possibly be contained in that promise to Abram?

If that wasn't enough to drive her to despair, it is going to get worse. As the years passed, Abram wondered, what is going to happen to everything I possess? Having no heir, he thinks it will all pass to my chief servant. But God made it clear to him that he would have his very own son.

We read: Then the Lord said to him, "No, your servant will not be your heir for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir."

Hearing from Abram that God has promised him an heir, Sarah just becomes desperate. Despair can make us do crazy things. Have you ever been there? You know that God has promised to provide what you need but his timing is clearly not working with yours so you take things into your own hands. Despair makes us rationalize. For Sarah, desperation meant taking matters into her own hands and making a way that she could give Abram a son.

Now surrogate motherhood was not uncommon and so Sarah told Abram to sleep with her servant Hagar and so he did, and Hagar gave birth to a boy, Ishmael. You can read whole story in Genesis 16 but it's a situation that leads from one disaster to another.

Now obviously, you can understand why she did it. She loved her husband. There was no way she could have a child so she worked out how to fix that. Sarah had it all figured out. She would get Abram a son her own way. The boy Ishmael is seen as Abram's son but clearly not Sarah's.

Now Sarah now as we move on is 76 years old and what follows, 13 years of silence -- 13 years! Don't you think that's the hardest thing to bear? You don't hear from God in 13 years? For 13 years Sarah had to watch Abram play with and care for a child that's not her's. She's got to conclude God's forgotten me. She had made this happen but all it brought her was despair and heartache.

I wonder if you've ever been there. On your knees you've presented your request before God and he is silent. You prayed for a husband -- silent. You've begged for a child -- silent. Now when God seems silent, it is tempting to improvise, to do things our own way. For Sarah, it must have seemed as if despair is all she's going to know for the rest of her life. But God -- two of my favorite words -- but God hadn't forgotten her.

This is what God said to Abram in Genesis 17: God said to Abram, "As for Sarah, your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai, her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations, kings of people will come from her."

God changes her name from Sarai, which means my princess, to Sarah, which means mother of nations. Amazing! But for Abraham and Sarah, it sounds ridiculous.

Let's take a look at Genesis 17:17 says this: Abraham fell face down. He laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man 100 years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of 90?"

It wasn't just Abraham that doubted it. To Sarah, it sounded impossible. In Genesis 18 God spoke to Abraham but Sarah was listening in as all good wives do.

God said: "I will surely return to you about this time next year and Sarah, your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old and Sarah was past the age of childbearing so Sarah laughed to herself and she thought, after I'm worn out, and my Lord is old, well, will I now have this pleasure?" Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child now that I'm old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son." Sarah was afraid so she lied and said, "I didn't laugh!" But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

Well, it's not much up to this point that would qualify Sarah for the Hall of Fame wall. But you know what's great about this? We see our failures and our lack of faith and God sees what we will become as his spirit faithfully works through broken places of our lives. God's timing is perfect for his plans. It's just not always perfect for ours. Sarah was about to see that very clearly.

In Genesis 17, we see God promise a son through Sarah. And then again in 18, the Lord confirms, "Sarah will bear a son." And finally, Genesis 21, at 90 years of age, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. God fulfilled his promise just as he said he would. God did the impossible and turned Sarah's laughter of disbelief into a laughter of pure, unadulterated joy.

And Sarah declared, "God has brought me laughter. All who hear about this will laugh with me. Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse a baby? Yet I've given Abraham a son in his old age."

I don't know where this finds you in your own life right now. Perhaps despair is far more present than faith. But do you remember how the Psalmist David used to speak to himself when he felt the cold fingers of despair?

He would say, "Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God. I will praise him again, my Savior and my God. Now I am deeply discouraged but I will remember you."

Just as God had Sarah in his loving, merciful hands all alone, he has a good strong hold on you too. Maybe you've gotten ahead of God's promises. Maybe you've acted out of desperation and tried to force God's plan into your own timing. But I want to remind you that God is still in the business of fulfilling his promises in your life regardless of your past.

When I was filming the DVD for the book, *The Storm Inside* the last session I had to tape was this one, "Moving from Despair to Faith." And God taught me a powerful lesson that day. I had been to my doctor maybe a month before because I had a kidney stone and they had taken an x-ray in the E.R. I showed it to my doctor and she said, "It looks like the stone has passed but I don't like the

look of this. What is this?"

I said, "I have no idea."

She said, "Sheila, why didn't you bring this to me the minute you got it?"

I said, "Honestly, I just got busy."

She said, "Well, this is something we need to do something about right now." So I had some more tests, more scans and she said, "Yeah, we need to have you in surgery on Monday."

My doctor is a believer and a friend of mine. I said, "I can't. We're going to be in Austin filming this DVD Bible study series. The crew are already all there. I said, "Can't we just put it off for just a few more days?"

And she said, "Well, literally, a few more days but then you need to be in surgery."

So I said, "Okay!" So we went to Austin, we filmed all the rest of the series and then we were doing this very last one. And I wanted to get up early that morning because we were staying in this beautiful horse ranch and I wanted to catch the sunrise. So when the rest of the crew were still all asleep I made myself some coffee and I got my Bible and I made my way into this field and I just sat and waited for the sun to rise. I had my cell phone with me. My doctor had said, "If I contact you I want you to get back to me." So I looked and there was a doctor from my message but it's still like 5:30 in the morning. And she said, "Whenever you get this, call me." Yikes! So I called her. She said, "I've brought some other people in to look at this and it's not good, Sheila. We're going to move you." She named the hospital in the Dallas area that's a cancer specialist. I said, "So you think this is cancer?" She said, "Yeah, I do." And she said, "So I want you in surgery 6:00 Monday morning." So I said, "Okay."

So now I've got this life to film: Moving from despair to faith. But here's the beautiful thing about the Lord. I gave my life to Christ when I was 11; now I'm 61, God has a track record with me of his faithfulness. I watched how God has shown up in ways I couldn't have expected. I've watched how God did things in his timing that were perfect. So here's what I prayed that morning, before anyone else got up. I got on my knees in the grass there as the sun was rising and this was my prayer, "Lord, this is not a surprise to you. It is a surprise to me but it wasn't a surprise to you. So here's what I'm asking of you. I want you to do whatever will bring more glory to your name. If it will bring you more glory for this to be cancer, then I'm all in. Maybe there will be a woman in the bed beside me who has never heard your name. If it will bring you more glory for it not to be, I'm all in too. I leave everything in your hands with absolute confidence in your goodness."

So we went out. The crew woke up, we did the last filming. It's Monday morning, there I am 6:00 a.m. Usually, when you're going into surgery they give you something in a drip first that makes you a little woozy. Apparently you can't get it at Wal-Mart. I've asked! But for some reason that day they didn't. So I'm being wheeled into surgery and I'm wide awake so I'm looking around. A young nurse comes in and I can't see her face because she is all masked. And she comes up and takes my hand. I think she is just going to take my pulse but she doesn't. She takes my hand and she says one word, "Jesus." It's like the whole operating room was full of the glory of God. And I went to sleep.

When I woke up my doctor and my husband were standing at the bottom of my bed and from my husband's face I could tell that it was an answer he was happy with. My doctor said, "Well, the tumor was bigger than we expected but it was benign."

Here's the truth. Whichever way it had gone, God is good. Whatever way it had gone, God is faithful. See we think because certain things have not worked out in our life, God doesn't love us. But that's not the case. Maybe you've been disappointed, maybe you've been heartbroken. Maybe you think, God, why did you answer her prayer? Why did you answer his prayer? What am I doing wrong? That is the enemy that loves to condemn and to confuse us, to accuse us as God's children. So I just ask you in the name of Jesus whatever you are going through right now would you bring it to him?

I love what it says in First Peter five: Cast your cares upon Him because He cares for you.

I love this too: So do not fear for I'm with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

That's the truth of the gospel. We don't live as people who have no hope. We live as people who knows clearly who is watching over us and loves us. And that brings such joy and hope and peace. And from that position, we're able to reach out and make a huge difference in the lives of other people. Watch this.

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 remember, for the first time we've been able to work with children who have clubfoot. You have helped us change the lives of children all around the world.

At Christmas time I know that you think of your kids and you want to do something really special for them. Well, I also know that 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 hookworm 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 can have your very own pair of shoes.

So on behalf of my little brother, may I simply say obrigada.

End of clip

Sheila: Clearly fluent in that language! Honestly, what a joy that was! It was amazing. And to see his face just light up.

So that's kind of our commitment here at *LIFE Today*, *LIFE Outreach International*. This Christmas, we want to provide 150,000 pairs of shoes. That's why we're coming to you a little bit early so we can get all of those ordered and we can get them shipped and in the hands of these families for Christmas. What a joy it will be when they've never had a pair of shoes before.

They're amazing! They're great little shoes. The thing I love about them too is that not only are they good for walking but they're really good for being in water because so many of the diseases that these children end up with come through cuts in their feet and then being in water where there is waterborne disease. So to be able to give them these is just amazing.

Here's the fantastic news. Do you know that for \$36 you and your family can send ten pairs of shoes for Christmas? \$36! Where can you go and get anything for that these days? For \$180 you can provide 50 pairs of shoes! What a joy! I want to thank, for those of you who have been our faithful partners through the years, thank you! Thank you so much! But this time we want to really up our giving. We just want to make a difference to so many people. We live in such a culture of just consuming, consuming everything -- more of this and more of that. I think as God's children we need to be different because we're not looking for what will make us feel better, we're looking for what we can do in the name of Christ.

So we've taken on as a family project in my house to be able to do something this Christmas. In fact, one of things I love so much is that we have Christmas Shoes & Smiles. Some children who

are born in countries where there's no medical attention at all, if they're born with cleft palate, they become outsiders. They don't smile. They don't want to go to school. They just have people staring at them.

So that's what Barry and I have decided each year that we will give each other for Christmas, is for \$500 we have these amazing doctors who will perform one cleft palate surgery. Some of you can afford to do this. Some of you can do four surgeries. Some of you can't do much but \$36? Ten pairs of shoes? We can all do something.

So please would you go to your phone? Would you dial that number and let's make this the best Christmas for some of these children that have never had anything before. And I honestly believe, it will make our Christmas better too because instead of receiving in Jesus' name we've been giving.

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

In the studio:

Sheila: Don't you love those little shoes? We have them on our Christmas tree and it is a beautiful reminder of just the joy of giving. There is something so beautiful about being able to give in Jesus' name and help so many people. 150,000 pairs of shoes -- that's a lot of shoes! But together, we can do this. We can do this in Jesus' name.

Perhaps you feel like Barry and I, moved to put a smile on the face of a child who has never been able to smile before. We're so grateful for our one son and so many parents ache for their children because they need a surgery that they cannot afford but some of us can make that Christmas prayer come true. For any gift you send in, we will send you *The Storm Inside* DVD where I tell that story in the field that day.

So I just want to thank you again for being with us. Don't take that for granted. I'm Sheila Walsh and I'll see you next time in *Wednesdays in the Word*.