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Week 42: Transport LIFE

Wednesdays in the Word

Sheila Walsh: In the Middle of the Mess #2

Sheila: Hi, I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. So we're in the middle of a series talking about Life in the Middle of the Mess: Finding Strength for this Beautiful Broken Life.

I've discovered in my years of following Christ that sometimes it's in the place of greatest brokenness that we have the greatest invitation to come as we really are; not as we are on our good days when we feel like the Lord must think oh, look how well they're doing! But the days when you can hardly take another breath, the days when you can hardly lift your head off the pillow, I've discovered the beauty of the companionship of Christ, and sometimes it's when pain hits unexpectedly.

It really was that call no one ever wants to receive, the one that wakes you up from a dead sleep. And by the fact that you're fast asleep and it's the middle of the night you know something is wrong. For me it was a call from Scotland. It was Francis, my sister with news about our mum. All she said was, "She's gone, Sheila." Three words -- and life as I knew it, and as I'd come to rely on was just changed.

Mum had struggled with Alzheimer's for a few years and she'd had bladder cancer. So the hospital for her had become a familiar place. But then that June morning, and as the sun rose a seizure hit her and before the E.M.S. personnel could even get to her, my mum was gone.

I hung up with my sister and I booked the first flight I could get to Scotland, Dallas to Philadelphia, Philly to Glasgow. I know that route by heart. Then it is 40 minutes by car from Glasgow to Ayr, the seaside town where I grew up. My sister hugged me at the door and we both cried. At least mum didn't suffer, that's what we'd want. We all say these things but it doesn't make the pain any easier to bear; does it? My mum was finally home. I mean that should be a cause of tremendous joy -- but honestly, that's not how I felt.

The day after mum's funeral I sat cross-legged on the guest room bed at my sister's house searching my Bible for verses that echoed my sadness. I wanted support, empathy, understanding of the depth of my sorrow and I wanted honestly to stay there for awhile. But so many of the

texts that I had underlined over the years, brighter days when hope's all around, seemed to miss the level of pain and sadness.

As I reflect on that day now I think I should have opened my Bible to Psalms and read them out loud or I could have sat with Job as he plummeted the depths of his own suffering. Now don't get me wrong, hope is a beautiful thing. I'm here today because of hope. It is real, it is powerful, it is a shelter in times of storm. But that day in my sister's house, my mum's death so fresh, I needed time to just stay in the present before rushing into the hope of the future. I needed in short to grieve.

I returned to mum's graveside the same day we buried her. The earth had been filled in, the plot of grass had been placed over it and the fresh flowers from family and friends all beautifully arranged in the front. I remember there were white lilies, beautiful cream tulips and yellow roses. It was lovely. But in that moment it felt like a metaphor for so many broken places in life and something inside me wanted to scream -- and you'll be grateful to hear I didn't -- but I wanted to scream, "Why do we do that? Why do we always cover over the gaping holes in our life? Why do we make what's so sad look so pretty and tidied up?"

Now a lot has been written on the process of grief. Somebody told me, "Grief will take just as long as it takes." Somebody else said, "The shortest way to the other side of grief is through. Grief is five stages and you have to experience every single one of them: Denial, bargaining, anger, sadness and then resolution." Another girl told me that journaling helped her.

I recognized the truth in many of those statements but those are not the hope that's offered to those of us who love Christ. Those verses underlined in my Bible that spoke so profoundly of our hope in Christ were absolutely right. Dead on! I knew they were. There is a proper way to grieve as a believer but grief must be combined with honest, truth-telling prayer. This is not the place to tidy yourself up or a random prayer shot up to heaven. This, when you're in the midst of pain is real life, gut wrenching, pouring out your heart to God even if all you can utter is the name, Jesus.

The hope that we're promised won't reach into the depths of where we're hurt unless we dare to tell God the whole truth; when we pour out the pain to the one who's promised to catch every tear that actually could become good grief.

The Psalmist David wrote, "You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You've recorded each one in your book."

For some of my life I didn't know how to embrace the hope that's ours in Christ because I didn't understand that I could pour out the whole ugly truth to him and he would still love me. I wonder

about you. Is it hard for you to invite God into the darkest corners of your heart? Too often we build a fortress around our hearts, a wall high enough to hide behind. Afraid if God saw who we really are, what we really think, what we're really feeling, then we would be left alone, abandoned. And this walled off place is easy to disguise for the simple reason we built it inside. We think it will keep me safe.

The truth is it just keeps us alone. It keeps us from living in the beauty of so many glorious promises like this one found in Romans chapter eight, last two verses: *And I am 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 the earth below -- indeed nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that's revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

I love those verses.

Well, mum's death shook me to my core because she's always been a tower of strength in my life: Quiet, rock-solid strength. My mum always loved me on my good days and on my bad. That's what mums are supposed to do. But now that she was gone I felt little.

I wonder about the losses that you've faced in your life. Have you ever been in a place where you're tempted to think, I will not survive this. Well, right down through history people have felt that way. They've taken a close look at the level of their brokenness, their pain and determined there's just no hope.

Do you remember the woman caught in adultery? We read her story in John chapter eight. She was dragged in front of the crowd, thrown in the dirt at the feet of Jesus and all eyes were on her shame. The sin, the self-loathing she must have felt, the judgment of the crowd, the embarrassment, the pain -- but she wasn't alone in her mess for there stood the Messiah.

There's no greater place to be thrown than at the feet of Jesus. See, the religious crowd thought they had Christ trapped. If he judged her, the crowd would turn on him. But if he let her go, he was ignoring the Law of Moses. Can you imagine the tension in the air? What will Jesus do? The Pharisees cried out that the Law of Moses said she should be stoned. Silence.

Then Christ spoke, "All right. Well, let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone."

Well, their stones dropped to the ground one by one until only Christ and the woman remained.

Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one

of them condemn you?"

"No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

I love that! And I love the order of the words. "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." First the love -- "I don't condemn you either." Then the life that leads out of that love, "Go and sin no more."

Perhaps your grief has nothing to do with the loss of a loved one but rather the loss of who you thought you were. As Romans eight, verse one declares: There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. For those of us in Christ there is no hopelessness. There is no ultimate brokenness. There is no lasting shame. That sinking sense that we are the problem, that we are the cause of our mess or still worse, the belief that we're supposed to be the ones to somehow get it together and fix ourselves, those things went with Jesus to the cross and those things did not rise again.

In Christ, our legacy isn't shame but joy. The Psalmist David wrote that those who look to Jesus for help will be radiant with joy, no shadow of shame will darken their faces.

Some of the greatest gains I've made in my understanding are this ability of Jesus to replace shame with joy, to literally save us from ourselves and our pain came through my friend Nicky Gumbel, vicar of London's Holy Trinity Church. It was Nicky who helped me see that salvation is not a one-time affair; a single point in time when I made a decision of surrender to Christ and then I'm just left on my own. Salvation, Nicky says, carries with it three tenses. Here they are. We've been saved from the penalty of sin. We are being saved from the power of sin. And one day, we will be saved from the very presence of sin.

I needed this understanding and I wonder if you do too. I needed to know that right there in the middle of the mess I can call out to Christ in open, honest prayer holding nothing back and be saved.

If you're at a place of fresh grief be gentle with yourself. Don't allow yourself or others to hurry you through the process. Jesus is not in a hurry.

I spent a month in a psych hospital some time ago -- long, long time ago now. The very first night there I wrote this in a journal: "I never knew you lived so close to the floor. But every time I'm bowed down, crushed by this weight of grief, I feel your hand on my head, your breath on my cheek, your tears on my neck. You never tell me, Lord, to pull myself together, to stop the

flow of many years. You simply stay by my side for as long as it takes -- so close to the floor."

One of the most powerful stories in scripture that illustrates God's provision of hope in a dark place is about a father and a son as seen introduced all the way back in the book of Genesis. That's where we find Abraham and Isaac, and an altar.

The story is found in Genesis 22 and says this: *Sometime later God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called.*

"Yes," he replied, "Here I am."

"Take your son, your only son, yes, Isaac whom you love so much, and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will show you."

The next morning Abraham got up early; he saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him along with his son Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. "Stay here with the donkey," Abraham told the servants. "The boy and I will travel a little further. We will worship there and then we will come right back."

So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders while he himself carried the fire and knife. As the two of them walked on together, Isaac turned to Abraham and said, "Father."

"Yes, my son," Abraham replied.

"Well, we have the fire and the wood," the boy said, "But where are the sheep for the burnt offering?"

"God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham answered.

And they both walked on together. When they arrived at the place where God had told them to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son Isaac and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice and at that moment the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Yes!" Abraham replied, "Here I am."

"Don't lay a hand on the boy," the angel said. "Do not harm him. Don't hurt him in any way for now I know you truly fear God. You've not withheld from me even your son, your only son."

And then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in the thicket so he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means the Lord will provide.)

I can't imagine how hard that must have been for Abraham. But what I find so fascinating is what Abraham said to the servants. He said to the servants, "The boy and I will go up to worship and we will be back."

You see by that point God had such a track record with Abraham that he knew even if I have to stick this dagger in my son, God has promised that through this boy -- through this boy that my offspring will be greater than the stars. So Abraham believed, even if I have to stab him, God can bring him back to life like that.

It's interesting that that ram caught in the thicket was pointing to someone else who would step into our place, the Lamb of God, the perfect sinless Lamb of God who would walk up that same hill but would not get to walk back down again. When Christ hung on the cross and took our place, he was setting us free from the penalty of sin. But it doesn't mean that the pain of life disappears. But that's where we find our hope.

See up until that point, Abraham's hopes were placed in a boy but really, he realized, no, my hope is in the God who keeps every promise he made.

If you find yourself in a place where you're grieving losses and you find yourself wondering, is there any comfort in this world? Just remember that God catches your tears, he waits with you in the midst of what is not working. In the waiting rooms of life Christ is with you. And because of what Jesus did, you and I get to live with fresh hope.

One of the things I love so much about everything we do here at *LIFE Today* and *LIFE Outreach International* is that when I was a little girl I remember thinking, Lord, I want my life to make a difference. I want to find that where in the world people are hurting and then I want to go there in your name and let them know there's hope. And now, I get to do it. Would you watch this with me?

On the mission field

Announcer: They say the shortest distance between two points is a straight line but there are no straight lines on the mission field. Instead, you'll find some of the most challenging roads on earth. They wind through mountains, jungles and deserts full of bone-rattling potholes and grinding sand. In fact, calling them roads is often an exaggeration. Many times there is little

more than a trail to follow from village to village.

While many people are moved to help feed the hungry, provide water for those who thirst and bring freedom to those caught in human trafficking, they rarely stop to realize that without transportation the majority of *LIFE*'s outreaches would come to a grinding halt.

David: This is a good example right here. We talked about it everywhere we've been. We can't get through here. If we can't get through, these kids don't get anything. They don't get water, they don't get the food. They don't get any supplies that we're going to have. We've got to get through. This is a prime example. You've got to have the right vehicle for the right terrain and this is clearly not the right vehicle.

Announcer: In order for the gospel to continue down these roads in both word and deed, there must be reliable transportation. The wear and tear these vehicles are subjected to is incredible with some having already logged hundreds of thousands of miles under the worst conditions imaginable. Maintaining these vehicles is no longer a viable option. They must be replaced and soon if the outreaches of *LIFE* are to continue to reach out across the world to those for whom Jesus died.

Cissy: Our mission is to reach every person with the gospel of Christ and to rescue every child from the evils of human trafficking. Our big truck is 14 years old now and on its last legs. We are in need of a new truck to keep our children as safe as possible.

Announcer: So it comes down to this, while some people only see trucks and other forms of transportation, others see the feet of the gospel by which thousands across the world are coming to know Jesus and his love. The real question is, what do you see?

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: A scripture says: "*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace.*" I think there is something so interesting about the idea of a need, someone who can provide for that need, but then this kind of gap in the middle. It's something I hadn't even thought about until I got to take some trips by myself. I've been in all of those roads.

I've been with ZOE and I've watched as we've gone way up high in the mountains in Southeast Asia to tiny little villages where children have never heard the word *trafficked* or who know nothing about it will suddenly be -- some guy will arrive at the edge of the village and maybe he has candy or he has a little puppy and he'll ask two or three of these sweet darling children,

"Come over and see what I've got!" And before their parents even realize anything happened the children are gone and they never see them again.

I went with our team into this little village and I watched them out of this old rickety truck set up this amazing equipment and educate these children, teach them what to do when something like that happens.

I've been in Africa where we've gone over the worst roads possible and some days I thought we're not going to make it. It's taken us hours sometimes. Once we went down a hill and landed in so much mud and water that we all had to get out into the mud and water to lighten the load of the truck just to get through. But I've also seen what it was like two hours later when we made it to that village and these children had been standing in line waiting for us.

See we love to do mission feeding. We love to drill water wells. We love to rescue children from the hands of evil but we need to be able to get to them. So our goal, and it's doable -- we can do this! We need 71 new vehicles. Some are trucks, some are motorcycles, depending on how hard it is to get into the area.

So our goal is \$1.12 million for this year. That might sound like a lot but we can all do something. Perhaps you can give \$40 or \$80 or \$120; some of you perhaps can give \$1,000. Now for any gift at all that you send we'll send this beautiful *Sweetest Name* classic hymns CD and booklets. If you're able to give \$120 then we have this really beautiful super-giant print reference Bible. And if you're able to give \$1,000, then of course, we have this lovely bronze.

The thing is, there is such a need and it is right now. I know that one or two of the places I went, I know the vehicles will not survive the rest of the year. So you guys are amazing. You help us so much but we need to be able to get that help to the place where it is needed; 71 vehicles, you and I together, we can do this.

Would you go to your phone? Would you make a call? Would you give the best gift that you can possibly give and get the good news to those who are dying to hear it?

On the mission field

Announcer: It's a missionary's nightmare, having lifesaving relief supplies in your hand and no way to get it to those who are suffering. Some of the vehicles so vital to our outreaches are completely worn out and must be replaced. And in some critical areas no transportation is available at all. *Life's* mission partners have immediate and urgent needs to transport lifesaving

supplies to children and families in remote locations. An additional 1.1 million dollars is needed to purchase 71 vehicles, large and small. Your gift of \$40, \$80, \$120, or \$1000 will help purchase these vehicles and provide lifesaving food, clean water, medicine, and the good news of Jesus to people in need.

With your gift of any amount, be sure to request *The Sweetest Name* classic hymns CD with a booklet containing the history behind the hymns for all twelve songs.

With your gift of \$120 or more, please request the NIV Super Giant Print Reference Bible, ideal for anyone looking for a Bible that's gentle on the eyes.

Finally, please prayerfully consider a gift of \$1000 or more to help transport life. And you may request our beautiful Determined Eagle bronze sculpture.

Please call, write, or make your gift online!

End of clip

On the mission field

James: We are driving in sand. Look at this. This particular area, if you did not have four-wheel drive vehicles you couldn't go 50 yards. And so we need you to know that what we have is essential to saving lives. It is absolutely critical. Like Betty said one time, we're talking about a truck, "No, we're not talking about transportation merely." She said, "We're talking about saving lives -- we're talking about lives." So when we ask you to give a truck, provide transportation, whether it is small trucks for the missionaries that make daily runs or whether it is the big transport trucks, it is critical to saving lives and maintaining health.

And from the depth of my heart for those of you who understand, I want to say thank you.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you! And then I'll like forward to going there and showing you pictures of the new trucks and the difference it's making in the world. So please call.

I'd love to stay connected with you, kind of during the week so if you want to go to my Facebook page it is Sheila Walsh connect. Yeah, smart. Huh? And then we can kind of keep in touch and

I'll post updates there too.

But I want to thank you so much for supporting James and Betty, for standing with the ministry of *LIFE Today*; of getting help but not just practical help, not just food, not just water but getting the life of Jesus Christ to those who desperately need to know there is a God in heaven and he loves you.

Thank you so much. I'll see you next time.