

11/8/17
Week 46: Fall Mission Feeding
Wednesdays in the Word: Sheila Walsh
In the Middle of the Mess #5

Sheila: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Thanks so much for joining me here on *Wednesdays in the Word*.

When I sat down to write my book *In the Middle of the Mess*, finding strength for this beautiful broken life, I was probably about a third of the way in when I got the news from my sister that my mom had died. Even though she was about to turn 87 -- so I had to know that that was going to happen sometime soon, what I didn't understand was how much it would impact me. I felt myself reeling after her funeral.

The thing that I was discouraged by, honestly, was I found myself kind of cycling back into depression. I thought I was beyond that. I thought I'm in a good place, I'm really consistent with the things I need to do but somehow that took me to a new level of beginning to question where exactly I was in this whole journey.

So what I want to say to you today is if you're in a place where you feel discouraged because you think, you know what? I thought I had this. I thought I was in a different place; I thought I'd never go *there* again. I want you to know that the grace of God is here for you right now; that God is not absent when we suffer and struggle. God is very present and I was to discover that.

Because as I said on the first... I guess one of the things that was the hardest was maybe my first birthday after mom's death, there would be no birthday phone call, no birthday song. Honestly, my mom couldn't really sing in tune but I loved her singing happy birthday to me every year. So I found myself sinking into depression again. I couldn't concentrate very well. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't make myself engage with my friends even though I knew that was what I really needed to do. The only thing that sounded appealing to me, honestly was to get in bed and just pull the covers over my head.

I don't know if you've ever been there. Well, if your experience is anything like mine, you're going to do the hard work in life of finding strength in tough times in the middle of your mess. You'll accept losses, you'll grieve them, you'll learn to tell the truth honestly to God and to trusted friends. But then you're going to realize that at times your mess is still a mess. It hasn't

all been cleaned up and permanently removed. If there's anything that this journey through brokenness has taught me is that my distinct need, when handled honestly in God's presence, leads me to God's distinct ability to meet me right there.

One of the scriptures that have soothed me on many, many a sleepless night is found in Romans Chapter 12, verse one. He writes: I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present yourself bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Well, that little word *present* -- *present* your bodies as living sacrifices has significant meaning here. In the Greek it is the verb he or to offer once and for all. It is a one time commitment, a weighty covenantal thing. Think of the way that a wife or a husband offers herself or himself to a spouse; or more profoundly the way Christ offered himself up to the cross to sacrificially present. This is a setting of your face in a certain direction never to turn back again even when temptations surround us -- and they will. Even when darkness comes. Even if depression comes knocking again. Even when suffering unfolds. Even when questions outnumber answers. Even when we've done our part. Even when things get messy again. I think especially, especially then. To present ourselves is to hand ourselves over to Jesus over and over again daily regardless of the circumstances and the challenges that have been handed to us on any given day.

The reason that this understanding of this scripture has been so helpful to me is that it reminds me that there is purpose in my pain. If I view my pain as just random, as a cruel taunt by a heartless creator that is destined to eventually take me down, if we believe that we're going to sink deeper into desperation seeing life as just disposable, unkind.

But if we view our pain as the mirror through which God's sufficiency can be reflected then we bear up under the suffering knowing it's serving to make us more like Jesus Christ. My need, your need, when handled with spiritual honesty will lead us to God's ability to more than meet it.

When you and I are able to shift perspective in this manner our central plea before God shifts to well, instead of begging, please God. Please take this suffering away from me. Our prayer can change to: Please father, show yourself strong through this suffering, through this pain, through my life, through me; glorify yourself in me.

In my view, there is no better personification of this kind of shift in perspective than that of the apostle Paul. As you know in Second Corinthians he spoke of having what he called "a thorn in the flesh," a subject long debated by much smarter minds than mine right through the ages. And there are all sorts of theories about what the thorn was. Had he gone blind? Did he suffer from chronic headaches? Did he have malaria? Was he being persecuted for his beliefs? Nobody really knows because Paul never clearly says. But what we do know is that Paul really

begged for God to take it away.

In Second Corinthians 12:8 Paul wrote: "Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. I think we all can relate to a prayer like that. Whether it is a financial crisis, marriage problems, health issues, job loss, whatever -- whatever you might be struggling with right now the cry of our heart often is "Father please, please take this away!"

For me, the depression, the tendency toward isolation, the suicidal thoughts that I've struggled with for most of my life, yeah. I want to pray, "Father, please won't you just make them leave?"

Well, Paul had laid down his earnest request and now it was God's turn to respond. Paul writes: But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Now I'd imagine initially that probably was not the answer Paul wanted to hear, certainly not what we want to hear when we're right in the middle of pain. But this God who possesses all power, all wisdom, all capacity, all things, why would God choose not to intervene? The answer centers on whose glory we're seeking: God's or our own?

"My power," God's power is perfected in weakness. So I have to ask myself, I ask you, do we desire God's power that much?

It was during the same time of darkness and grieving that I went deep, deep into the word of God. I pray that you have found as I have that God's living word is a shelter in times of storm. Well, this time I wanted to understand what it truly meant to be set apart for Christ as Paul implied when he spoke of us as having presented ourselves once and for all as sacrifices unto the Lord. What were the implications of such a decision as it relates to living well in this broken messy world? Well, I was determined to find out.

Interestingly enough, my search took me to the Old Testament where the phrase "set apart" first appeared. In the Old Testament sacrificial system there were many gold and silver plates and pieces that existed but some of them were set apart for use in the temple during worship of God. Now those pieces had only one purpose which was to wait in service of God. A description pretty fitting for you and me. We wait and we exist to serve God.

The day that you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ you virtually distanced yourself from the world from your sin, and from your shame by your decision you said, "I'm not my own anymore. I'm God's now, set apart for his use." From that day forward then your life possessed a singular aim bringing God's glory even in the messiest of messes.

Now as I look at my own life, it's true, God could have prevented my father's suicide. He could

have taken away my depression, he could have spared me from the psych ward -- he could have done all of those things but he didn't. I could have lived a very different story. And even as you look at your life he could have prevented your bankruptcy. He could have not let your path cross that abuser's path and kept you from that first sip of wine that led to a merciless addiction. He could have given you the child you so wanted. He could have made sure that you got that job, that promotion. He could have kept your vehicle on the road on that snowy night. He could have made your husband, he could have made your wife stay. The question that will transform your life and mine isn't why didn't God do these things? But rather, Father, how can I bring glory to your name in the middle of this? How can I worship in the middle of the storm?

Let me say again, our need when handled honestly in our Father's presence points directly to God's ability to meet it. Our brokenness can glorify God if we'll let it. Our brokenness can honor his name when it's surrendered to him. When our surrendered brokenness meets God's mercy, power flows like a mighty river.

As we continue because it is an ongoing process to lay down our suffering, God continues to flow perfect power our way. I believe that's how we can be thankful in every circumstance good and bad. We can be thankful because we understand the purpose here all for your glory, Father -- all for you. Use my weakness to display your full power. Show the world this power that's never known.

Isaiah 40, a well-known passage says: The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depth of his understanding. He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who wait, who trust in the Lord will find new strength, they will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

What a promise! Now you might be thinking that this power I'm talking about doesn't feel very powerful at all. That's true! This power that comes by way of our weakness doesn't look powerful in any sense of the word or any way the world looks at it. The strength God sends in our dark mess doesn't look very strong. Power and strength as defined by the world's standards don't look a thing like what we're given as God's children. But I believe with all my heart that when we allow Christ into our brokenness and ask him to heal us however he chooses, we become stronger and more powerful than any force this world has ever known.

The Apostle Paul surely grasped this incredible truth for in another of his writings he wrote of how we reflect this power from God. The goal here, Paul essentially said, is not to "power up" as the world would have you do but rather as detailed in Ephesians six to suit up with the armor of God. This weaponry has nothing to do with guns and missiles. It is an arsenal of spiritual tools;

truth, for example, righteousness, a heart to bring about peace, faith, a helmet of salvation, the power of the word of God. And to that mix we can add the things I've talked about in this book, transparent conversation with God, confession with trusted friends, quiet, meditation on the word, forgiveness, the practice of humility and holding on to hope. With God's power we discover that he really is working things together for good, that he really is making all things new.

"I have already begun," he promises in Isaiah 43:19: "Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland. I, the Lord am doing something new."

So we pray, Lord, do this new thing through us. Let our brokenness produce something brand-new that will bring glory to you. So no matter what we're dealing with, we keep laying it down, and laying it down, and laying it down again.

For me, whether it is depression, I lay it down. I bring it into his presence. I don't know what you struggle with. It could be anger. It could be alcoholism, controlling, overspending, pride, envy, self harm. We lay down comparisons. We stop comparing ourselves with each other. We lay down our failures and we lay down our fear. We lay it all down knowing that these trying circumstances we face do not at all define who we are. We are not our mess. Far from it. That's not how we're defined.

We are the demonstration of God's ability to use our circumstances for good. I'm not Sheila Walsh whose father committed suicide. I'm not Sheila Walsh the psych patient. And you, you're not Jennifer the alcoholic. You're not John the drug abuser. You're not Abby the control freak. You're not David the porn addict. You're not Bethany the depressed. Whatever mess you're in the middle of you are not that mess. When you've placed your trust in Christ, you are a well loved daughter of the King of kings. You are a son of God. So we can thank God even in your brokenness when we realize that brokenness leads us to his strength. So we say thank you. Thank you from right in the middle of my mess.

I'm so aware that when I have these shows and have this opportunity to talk to you which I'm so grateful for, that I don't know what you are dealing with personally but I want to remind you that you have a Father who knows exactly every detail of what you're facing right now. And if you feel like you're struggling and you didn't deserve it or if you feel like you're in a mess because you caused it, the invitation remains the same to come to him in the middle of our mess and allow his power to transform us.

One of the joys of living a loved forgiven life is it helps you to look to those who need that very love to touch them right now. Would you watch this with me?

On the mission field

Cubal Malnutrition Clinic: Angola

Isak: Coming to malnutrition clinics like this is so devastating to see children because unfortunately, so many more children don't leave these clinics than what leave them.

But it's even more devastating to me today because this clinic is so full. You can see how they've actually put in extra beds down the aisle here. That's not normal because the conditions in this area have reached absolute desperation. As a result, the clinics are full -- full with children who are fighting for their lives, children who have literally reached that stage of being on death's door.

I've got to tell you that I'm tired of this situation. I'm tired of watching children die in clinics like this; child after child, mother after mother whose heart is broken... because of something so simple. The fact that children don't have enough food -- it's an injustice! Because if we remain silent to the silent killer, malnutrition will win the battle again and again and again.

Please we've got to do what we can do because we're able and together we need to act. But this is not where we solve it. Where we have the greatest chance is out there in their villages before children get into a severely malnourished state -- before they end up here. If we can just take Mission Feeding to those villages we can save those children's lives. We can save them from coming here. We can save them from death's door.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: I was in that very malnutrition clinic in Cubal in Angola a year before this recent trip of Isak's. To see so many more beds there than the time when we were there is just devastating. They told us the situation is getting so much worse.

I had never seen with my own eyes what it looks like when a child is dying of malnutrition. Their skin is literally peeling off. Their hair has turned red. I didn't understand that but it is simply a lack of protein. To watch these children struggling to take simply one breath. I remember being able to hold one little one and I assumed this child was a newborn and I asked how old and he said, "She's four months old." She weighed what my son weighed on the day he was born.

The thing about this situation, I so agreed with what Isak said, that he's tired of seeing that because here's the thing. We can change this. I've seen with my own eyes. Now I've watched these things on television for years and sometimes we almost get kind of immune to it but once you put your feet on that African soil and you walk into these places you will never be immune for the rest of your life. But I've also seen what he talked about. I've seen the hope. I've seen what happens when we're able to go into a village and provide food. It changes their lives forever. It literally, from that first bowl of very nutritious food, they're turned from that cycle of going no longer to death but going to life.

Each one of us can do something. Do you know that for just \$30 -- \$30 you can provide food for three children for three months? \$50, five children for three months? \$100, 10 children for three months.

One of the other things that we would love to ask if you'd consider doing in addition to that is that we need to do a food factory upgrade. The factory has faithfully served us for years but we need to update it. And if we do, it will become 50% more efficient. The food is amazing. I've seen the stats on everything that's in it, all the protein, the vitamins, the minerals that the children need.

But honestly today, I kind of want to speak to you on behalf of the moms because I've watched the moms in the malnutrition clinics bring their children in and so many of them feel guilty because they think, I left it too late. But they have no resources. They have no way of getting to the clinic with their dying child. These mothers, when I was there, our team, we told them, "Listen, we will not forget you. We will not forget you and we will make sure your children are cared for."

So what I want to ask you to do is would you go to your phone right now, make the best gift possible and let's change what can be changed in Jesus' name.

Begin video clip

Announcer: In impoverished and famine-stricken areas of Africa, children are suffering. The need is great. And without food, they face death by starvation. With your support, you will help feed and care for children in crisis areas of Sudan, Angola, and Mozambique.

With Africa facing ongoing food shortages and drought, we urgently need to replenish supplies and come to the aid of 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 an additional gift to help provide critically needed upgrades to our food factory that will increase overall production by a staggering 50%. This is a \$216,000 challenge above our normal feeding budget that could help save even more lives.

With your gift of any amount we'll send you *In the Middle of the Mess*. In her new book, Sheila Walsh brings insight to knowing the peace and presence of Christ in the midst of life's inevitable messes.

With your gift of \$100 or more to help feed and care for ten children, we will send you Sheila's book, plus the "Arise" coffee mug. This heat-activated mug reveals Isaiah 61 each time you fill it with a warm beverage; a wonderful way to begin your day.

And finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request our "Determined Eagle" bronze sculpture. Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of clip

On the mission field

Isak: As a result of your love and generosity as friends of LIFE we've been able to build this food factory. This food factory has saved tens, hundreds, even millions of lives as a result. But we need your help today. We need your help because we've got to expand this food factory because there are children in villages here as a result of the drought in this area and the fact that their families are not able to provide enough food for them and Mission Feeding is not reaching their villagers, these children are facing a critical situation.

It is not just a factory filled with machines. No! It is a factory that produces life. So I'm asking you please today, help us so that we can produce more food, package their food more efficiently and get it out to the children that so desperately need it.

The way that you can do that is by going online, by picking up the phone and dialing that number and giving the best gift that you can give, give the gift of life, give the gift of food.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much! Please keep phoning. Please do something. For every gift I'm so happy to be able to offer you *In the Middle of the Mess*. It is most personal book I've ever written; a hard book to write but I pray it will bring you real freedom. For a gift of \$100 we have something so cool -- I love this! It looks like a black mug until you pour hot liquid into it and

then ta-da! How great is that? That is a fantastic reminder every morning of who you are, of who our wonderful Father is.

So we'd love to send you those gifts. Really, this is just our way of saying thank you. But more than anything, we want to thank you for helping us be there for those children. I'll see you next time in *Wednesdays in the Word*.