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Week 45: Transport LIFE

Wednesdays in the Word

Sheila Walsh: *In the Middle of the Mess* #4

Sheila: Hey! I'm Sheila Walsh and I want to welcome you to *Wednesdays in the Word*. Honestly, I don't take it granted that you kind of pencil us in your calendar. So many of you have written to me on Facebook and done little notes on Twitter just to say, "I make it an absolute commitment to watch this every Wednesday." I want to say thank you. It means the world to me. My commitment to you is to be able to ask God by the Holy Spirit to be able to bring something from his word that will really make a difference in your life right now.

I got a letter from a woman just a couple of weeks ago. She said, "I've just gone through a tremendous loss in my life. I lost my husband really unexpectedly and I feel as if something inside of me toward God has just shut down."

I want to address that because I understand what that kind of pain can do. After my father died, when I was five, he committed suicide, I kind of basically just went inward. I didn't want to let people in. I kind of made a determination to protect myself from being disappointed, from being hurt to that level anymore. As I grew up I only built those walls higher, thicker, more and more impenetrable.

So when I hear the word *vulnerability*, that for me used to be a really tough word. I'm sure it would have helped me forge deep friendships through the years but the risk, it just felt too high -- way too high for me. But in God's mercy -- God's mercy is a small word but it weighs a lot. The walls I'd built couldn't hold.

I was hospitalized in 1992 for a month for depression. I remember sitting in a group therapy session and each morning others would share their struggles but I just sat there silent. One morning, one brave soul in the group said, "Sheila, when you're ready to fall off your shelf, I just want you to know we'll be here."

That's all it took. I was finally too tired to keep it altogether and I broke. I poured out my pain before these brothers and sisters and it was amazing. When I fell to my knees on the carpet, they held me. Honestly, it was every bit as painful as I thought it would be but I have to acknowledge that the process of allowing others to come around me, to get close to me, to climb with me as I

scraped my way out of the pit that I dug, I think it probably saved my life. Because the truth is, we need each other. I get that now. I'll never allow myself to forget that truth again.

Well, in the years that have passed since those therapy circle days, I've wondered again and again what it means to be a good, real friend in this messy broken world. How do we know how to be there for each other while we're suffering so much heartache when there is so much loss in the world?

If you're anything like me, the very real temptation we feel is to guard our heart from this offer, yet sometimes it feels like a threat of community of being with other people. It's tempting sometimes. I've actually heard people say, "Listen. I've got Jesus. He's all I need." And we're prone to say, "Jesus will never judge me. Jesus will never betray me. Jesus will never leave me. Jesus is in a word *safe*."

The truth is Jesus is sufficient and yet, if you and I are to be truly conformed to his image, truly transformed into his likeness, then we have to reconcile this little thing called "togetherness" that Christ modeled, not only in word but in action. You and I simply cannot read the gospels without coming face to face with Jesus community priority. It was really intentional. He sought out others with whom to do life.

The 12 disciples, they were his tribe. These men were not perfect, but Jesus chose them; they were perfect for him. And across the years of his ministry it was with these men that Jesus would share the best days and the worst days, the glories, the tragedies, the things he saw, his concerns, his very life.

And from these 12, Jesus would single out three of those men, Peter, James, and John to reveal a more intimate side of him still. The account is found in Luke Chapter 9 and it says this: Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray and as he was praying the appearance of his face was transformed and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. They were glorious to see and they were speaking about his Exodus from this world which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.

Peter and the others had fallen asleep. When they woke up they saw Jesus' glory and the two men standing with him. As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not knowing what he was saying blurted out, "Master! It is wonderful for us to be here. Let's make three shelters as memorials; one for you, one more for Moses, and one for Elijah."

But even as he was saying this, a cloud overshadowed them and terror gripped them as the cloud covered them. Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is my son, my Chosen One. Listen to him."

This was an amazing moment. Jesus' most significant moment of revealing his divinity. Christ had invited his friends to see his highest high, and soon thereafter those same friends would be allowed to witness his lowest low as he made his way to the Roman cross where he bore our sin, where he suffered and died.

Jesus and his closest friends were in this whole thing together. They were, as some people say, "In each other's business." Being with through and through. And while we can be sure that Jesus' brokenness in the Garden of Gethsemane felt utterly unbearable to him, he chose to share it with his closest friends.

To be perfectly honest, this is a part of brokenness that took me the longest to grasp; to acknowledge that brokenness is the beginning, which we discussed in session one. Well, that much I readily admit is the first step to hope. And to say that brokenness is hard, the topic of session two, well, yep, for me, that's plain. To declare that brokenness is loud as we looked at in session three, absolutely, it is loud. The voices of pain and condemnation scream their heads off, which is why it is critical to come into God's presence, craning an ear, listening for that still small voice.

But then there's this: Brokenness is shared. [Sighing] For a long time, I wasn't sure I wanted anything to do with that bit. My willingness to let others into my brokenness has risen among other things in direct proportion to my exposure to the choices that Jesus made during his final hours on planet earth.

The scriptures tell us that on the night before Jesus was to be crucified he took his closest three friends, Peter, James, John, deep into the Garden of Gethsemane. He looked into their eyes and rather than veiling his pain, burying his anguish, or pretending that all in his world was fine, he said to them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death." Such honesty from our Messiah, "My soul is crushed with grief." He was saying this pain that I'm experiencing right now just might be too much.

Can you imagine these words spoken by Christ? Fully God, yes. But also fully man with such a devastating task before him. Life hanging in the balance; such a tremendous weight that was his alone to bear. He did that thing that for so many decades I couldn't do. He invited his trusted friends into his pain. "Be with me here in my suffering," he was saying. "Don't let me bear this pain alone. Keep watch with me until the agony passes. Please stay close."

I wonder, can you relate to Jesus' desire not to walk his road of suffering alone? Do you get that his need even to have someone standing in the middle of his mess with him, to know that someone saw his pain? I've always been challenged by the exhortation of James 5:16 which

says: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Invite someone else in. Don't go alone. We're not made to do this journey on our own. The last part of that verse is beautiful. Even to a lifelong stuffer such as me. Confess your sins to each other, pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Let me tell you from my own heart, I found this verse to be true. There is healing in confession and prayer. Jesus saw fit to model something important for you and me in the way that he approached the cross. He didn't isolate. He didn't insulate. He didn't deny what was really real. Instead, he leaned into the strength and sureness of his community and together they suffered great pain. Together they walked that impossible road. Together they endured gut-wrenching grief.

And yet, when it came time for Christ to be arrested, they ran. See, they knew the master but they didn't understand the master plan. In the days that followed the resurrection however, these 11 men as you know Judas had of course, left them and hung himself by then. They banded together unafraid. Many of them went on to suffer martyrdom for a faith that could not be shaken. They suffered together for the one who gave his life for us all.

I wonder -- I wonder what is crushing your soul today. What pain do you fear might just do you in? Have you ever told the whole truth to a living, breathing person? Or have you kept these things hidden just between you and God? The reason this session, session four comes right after session three is because the two are a package deal. In session three we looked at the discipline of silencing the lies by leaning into the Father's truth. And here we're looking at the value of confessing to a trusted few in anticipation of them helping us shoulder a load that is too heavy. It is a powerful sequence, this duo, and one that Jesus himself lived out. By his example we see that the natural outpouring of time spent in God's presence is a willing engagement with the people he loves.

The precursor to that process of inviting men into his inner circle, Luke chapter 6 says, was a night spent in prayer with God. Verses 12 and 13 of Luke six say this: One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray and he prayed to God all night. And then at daybreak he called together all of his disciples and chose 12 of them to be apostles.

You see that? First, time alone with God and then inviting others into your life, and eventually into your pain. First, the holy conversation then the human relationship and confession. Holy conversation -- human confession; that's the sequence. Holy conversation before human confession. It must go like that every time. Why? Because when we invite God to speak into our mess before inviting others to listen to the mess, everything about that person-to-person confession changes. For me it's like -- it's almost like our words have been sanctified, set apart

after being filtered through the sieve of the love and mercy of God.

For me, I've found a good rule of thumb to be this: Confide in others only what you first confided in God. Come before God with open hands and an open heart saying, "Father, change my mind. Change my posture. Change my perspective. Change my thoughts. Help me see life as you do." And then seek out companionship for this broken, and yes, at times burdensome life. It is then you'll use your words wisely, honoring God even when you're in your mess.

One of my most trusted, darling friends is singer, Sandy Patty. We've been friends for over 30 years. We're the same age or as Sandy loves to remind me I'm about a week older than she is. We have walked through the good and the bad together for a long, long time. At my most vulnerable, Sandy was there to cover me.

Three weeks after I spent a month in a psych hospital I found myself boarding a cruise ship of all things, an appearance I'd agreed to a full year before. I was to join other artists in leading worship and doing concerts for the 500 or so guests on the boat. Even in spite of everything that had just happened in my life, I couldn't get out of the contract. And so honestly, in the most raw, fragile, emotionally unstable season of my life, I made my way to Fort Lauderdale in anticipation of boarding a ship.

I remember looking at the crowd surrounding me, taking in their sunny smiles, their pale faces waiting to be tanned, their eagerness, the laughter, the joy. And honestly, I just wanted to run. How on earth was I going to survive a week on a ship?

Well, another artist scheduled was Sandy. Thankfully just before I decided to bolt, Sandy saw me and yanked me from the line. "I've already checked you in. Come on! Let's find my room."

I plopped down on the bed looking every bit of heavy as I felt. Sandy took in my sad broken self when she said, "Sheila, here's the deal. My cabin is our safe place on this ship. When you want to run away, you run here. When you want to cry, you cry here."

I have to tell you, in that moment of compassionate companionship, nothing about my circumstance had changed but everything about my heart did. Here was someone to run to, a place that was safe. Here was a soft spot to land on every day. Here was a trusted friend.

That pain that we fear might just do us in, something about someone showing up to shoulder part of that load injects us with courage and hope. Maybe I really can make it. Maybe I can meal piece. Maybe all hope really isn't lost. Maybe I'll be able to walk through this with Christ after all.

All the things that God had reminded me during our quiet times together came to life in the presence of my friend. "Two are better than one," scripture promises "for if one falls the other can help."

Sandy and I used that safe place several times during the week. Two sisters in the Lord kneeling together at the throne of grace desperate for God to be for us who he promises to be. I came away from that experience more committed than ever to commit myself to the power of community in life.

So that's really my question for you today. Do you have a safe sister? A safe brother? Don't just go telling anybody your stuff. Jesus said, "Don't cast your pearls before swine." Don't take what is precious to you and give it to somebody who is going to trample on it. But find somebody, friend, that you can tell the whole truth to and let them pray for you. It gives you safety and security and hope because we're not designed to do this journey on our own.

Honestly, even thinking about that, a thought of a journey brings me to something that I'm very excited to share with you today. There are some journeys that can only happen if you and I commit to help. Would you watch this? And then I'll explain more about what I mean.

On the mission field

Announcer: For many years now, as part of our Rescue Life campaign, *LIFE Outreach* has partnered with a ministry in Southeast Asia called ZOE International. Together we have rescued many children from the dangers of human trafficking, and also have built a Life Center that provides a loving home for these children.

>> We are rescuing children from human trafficking giving them a fresh start at life. Each and every weekday we are taking over 50 children to and from school in a vehicle that is over 14 years old, and it is on its last legs. It's been through the wringer. We are in desperate need of a vehicle that we can rely on to keep our children safe.

>> ZOE Children's Home is located in the mountains and the road to the schools is steep and winding. It is especially dangerous during the rainy season.

Announcer: In addition to caring for the children at the Life Center, our mission partners also minister in remote villages in the area. The goal is to educate the children and their families about human trafficking and how to avoid becoming a victim of a trafficker.

>> We travel to remote villages located in the mountains and jungles to bring them the good news of Jesus Christ. When necessary, we take all the equipment needed to hold a meeting

including generators, sound, and video equipment, lighting, stages and tents.

We currently transport our equipment in three old pickup trucks, each of which has been driven nearly 250,000 miles on rough terrain. A heavy-duty six wheel truck would help us to more effectively bring the gospel to many who are hungry for God's touch.

>> Please ask God what he would have you do to not only help ZOE but life's other partners around the world who are in need of dependable transportation. God bless you!

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: That right there is so close to my heart because I was there. I got to go to Destiny House, a place that you helped us build. I saw these amazing kids. I got to sit on their beds with these girls and listen to them as they shared their stories and their hopes and their dreams for the future. I got to hear those who said, "I used to just be a number. I was just number six to a sex trafficker until I came here and discovered no, I'm a daughter of the Most High God."

And the thing that's amazing to me is that some of these children were literally taken from a village -- I mean a trafficker would approach them and these children never even heard of anything like trafficking or sex trafficking. Just some supposedly kind person comes up to them and says, "Hey! I've got some wonderful things to show you. Would you like to come?" And suddenly, they find themselves taken from their village, sometimes taken from their country into another place. And unless we intervene by God's grace, their family never hears from again.

Let me tell you one thing, do the traffickers have vehicles? Yes, they do. The traffickers have every vehicle they need. They are well funded. They can go into the most remote village. They can go to the worst place and they can get kids out of there in a second. We cannot let their resources be greater than ours. These kids are depending on us.

They are the most beautiful children. I had the privilege of speaking at the Sunday morning service with a whole group of maybe I think, 50 of these children that had been rescued from trafficking. It will be one of the most profound memories of my life. Then to get to sing to these children, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see."

God is doing remarkable things in Southeast Asia through our partners. But they need our help. That bus they're using to take the kids to school, I honestly think it's only going on prayer because when you look at it, you think, this is a disaster. So my ask today comes with, I am not

ashamed, every ounce of passion and energy I have to say, let's not let those who are evil let their resources be greater than those of us who come in the name of Jesus.

So our goal is we need to raise \$1.1 million. If you think about who we all you are -- we can do this. We're the church of Jesus Christ. We need 71 new vehicles but some of them need to go to those places where we can go in and get these kids out of these little hellholes and bring them to a place where they can hear the good news of the gospel. Maybe you can think, \$1.1 million? I can't do that! Of course not! We all can do something. You and I together, whether it is a gift of \$40, \$80, \$120 -- some of you can do \$1,000. Let's let our response to those who come in the name of evil be that we are coming in the name of the Lord. Would you go to your phone now and make the best gift you possibly can? Thank you!

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.

This is the last week! Please call, write, or make your gift online today!

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so, so much. I think the reason I feel so urgent today is this is our last week of Transport LIFE. So we need to get these vehicles in place. If you've tried to call and the number was busy, please persist. Those who are on the other side of things are very persistent but he who lives in us is greater than he who lives in the world. So let's let that good news go out all across the world that we are coming -- we're coming in new vehicles, we're coming in the name of Jesus. So please call, make your best gift and thank you so, so much.

Thanks for being with me on *Wednesdays in the Word*. I'm Sheila Walsh and I'll see you next time. God bless you!