

11/15/17
Week 47: Fall Mission Feeding
Wednesdays in the Word: Sheila Walsh
In the Middle of the Mess #6

Sheila: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. I want to welcome you to *Wednesdays in the Word*. Thank you so much for joining me here. Thank you to so many of you who have dropped me little emails or notes and say, "I've made a point, I always watch." A few weeks ago I was in Ohio and one of the ladies there, in a wheelchair, just the most beautiful older lady said, "I never miss an episode." So if you're watching, I just want to say hi and thanks so much.

When I was writing my book, *In the Middle of the Mess* I was very aware of the fact that in our world there is so much -- gosh, how would you even describe it -- so much evil? And yet, where evil is the grace of God is there too. There is darkness and there is light.

It's my prayer that you and I, in these days would be those who live in such a way that as First Peter says, that we would be able to give reason for the hope that is within us; that the light of Christ would be so strong in us that people would want to know, what do you know? Who do you know that I need to know?

I was thinking about light and how bright the sunlight is and it reminded me of the fact Barry and I, we have this favorite funky old movie theater a few miles from our home in Dallas. And on occasion, we'll park ourselves in those giant velvet theatre seats for two or three hours. If it's an early show, we try and go in the afternoon because we're old people now. We'll step out from that pitch-black theatre into the blazing sunshine outdoors. You know what that's like! And for a few moments you have to squint your eyes to get ready for how bright it is. You're surprised that it's still daylight outside.

That's the picture that comes to mind when I think of you and I finding strength in this beautiful, broken life -- blazing sunshine lighting up the devastating darkness all around.

This is the metaphor the beloved disciple John uses in describing God. In First John 1:5, we read these words: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all.

What this means for us is this: Whatever baggage, whatever brokenness we've been carrying, whatever pain we've stuffed deep inside, whatever darkness we have harbored can be overcome by the light of the Lord.

Whatever you're struggling with, all the pain, all the addiction, all the frustration, all the despair, all of it put in its rightful place, eclipsed by the light of Christ's glorious presence.

But how do we live like that every day? How do we share His light with those around us, with those we love? These are the questions I'd like us to look at here today.

It could be that you grew up in a home in which your parents perpetually made you feel like a disappointment. As you came into your own, you fell into one abusive relationship after another, leaving a little piece of your heart behind with every departure you made. Perhaps life has been a series of disappointments and lies, and as a result of the wounds you wonder is there anything else in life but the darkness I keep bumping into?

Or maybe you've fallen into that merciless trap of comparing yourself to other women. Perhaps you've done it since you were barely a woman yourself and those years of standing yourself up next to others and always coming away feeling less-than, that's overwhelming.

Maybe it's not that. Perhaps you've been battling disease for so long that you can't recall a time when you weren't plagued by physical struggle and pain. "Light" is not a word, a reality that makes sense to you at this moment.

The trouble with our secret struggles is that they're very believable when they're in the dark. But when our pain is brought into the light of God, somehow they lose their power, which is probably why we don't understand grace in the dark when we're hiding from God. Grace invites us into the light; it pours out into those who think they are broken beyond repair. The enemy would love to make us believe that our burdens will never go away. But the truth is the burdens we carry, we're told in scripture are temporary weights.

Paul writes about this in his second letter to the Church in Corinth. Second Corinthians, chapter four, verses 7 through 10, and then verses 16 to 18 say this:

"We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. We are pressed on every side by troubles but we are not crushed. We are perplexed but not driven to despair. We are hunted down but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we

fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.”

I love that passage! I love the truth of that. It’s hard to view our brokenness, our *mess* this way. I know that! And yet there it is in God’s word, in plain language we can all understand; all that we’re enduring in this present moment Paul calls, “light momentary affliction.”

The weighty load we’re carrying? Paul says that it’s light. The burden we’re bearing? Light. The latest struggle we’re struggling with? He says in terms of eternity, it’s light. All of the mess we find ourselves in can be surrendered to him; Paul is saying it is not heavy, it’s light.

What’s more, Paul also assigns time to our mess. This mess you may be in right now, the one that has convinced us it will never get cleaned up, it is momentary -- it’s temporary. It’s here for a time, but then it’s gone.

Paul then goes on to say where this mess is taking you and me, the purpose here, he explains to the church in Corinth, and to us, is to prepare us for something that is in fact heavy, and is in fact eternal: namely, the weight of God’s glory, which will surround us forever.

Over the years, as I’ve sought to live out my understanding of what is permanent and what is temporary, what is heavy and what is light, the beautiful words of that well-loved psalm, Psalm 23 have taken on new meaning for me.

Most mornings, in the early morning, I reach for my Bible, my journal, a hymnbook, a pen, a cup of coffee, and my iPhone, because I have my favorite worship playlist on it. I’ll head out into the garden and sit in my favorite chair. Sunrise by sunrise, I ask the Holy Spirit to show me, what are the lies I’ve believed? And ask God to replace them with truth. Often I’ve read the well-known words of that great hymn written by that little shepherd boy before he was ever King David, and I’ve let those words, those words of comfort sink into my soul.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

There are two things in particular about this psalm that strike me as it relates to our search for strength in the middle of our mess. First, you get the feeling from these words of David's that life is a journey, not a destination. Did you hear all the language of movement in those verses? Being led by peaceful streams. Guided along paths of righteousness. Highest highs and lowest lows -- brightest mountaintops and then dark valleys. Our brokenness and despair are temporary, not permanent. In this life, you and I, we're just walking through.

A second thing I love about Psalm 23, which sometimes it moves me to tears is this: the burden of responsibility in this journey is the Lord's, not ours. This journey is led by him. Think about it: The Lord is our shepherd. He lets me rest in green meadows. He leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. He is close beside us, whenever we walk through a valley that's dark or not. His rod and his staff protect and comfort us. He is the one preparing the feast. He honors us by anointing our heads with oil. Truly, our cup overflows with blessing because of him.

The journey is led by the Lord. More times than not, when I feel myself sinking under the weight of a burden that feels too heavy, it is because I'm trying to carry it in my own strength.

One morning, just after I'd read those words from young David, I opened my hymnbook and found these lyrics:

*O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be.*

And these beautiful words:
*O Light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze
Its day may brighter, fairer be.*

Those last lines, so beautiful, I think is the perfect summation of the Christ-following life; that you and I would daily have the courage and conviction to yield our flickering torches to the one, true Light of the world, the source of whatever light we know.

The Light of the world has come and in him, there is no darkness at all.

I was recently speaking to a group of 4,000 women. I was 40 minutes into a 45-minute message when I

realized with absolute certainty, the Holy Spirit was telling me I should shift the conclusion to my talk. What I'd had in mind was a traditional "altar call," inviting those who had no relationship with Christ to come to him. It was really clear to me that God was up to something else. I knew in that moment, what I was to do.

I took a deep breath, I looked out across the auditorium at all those beautiful lives and I said, "Tonight I have shared with you a lot of my story, so much of the darkness that I've dealt with. I have also told you and honestly, it was the first time I'd ever said this from a platform, I've told you of my lifelong struggle with suicidal thoughts; sometimes when the pain just felt too much to bear." And then I said, "I don't think I'm alone."

I told those gathered in the auditorium that night that I was going to ask them a difficult question, a question that would take great courage to answer. I paused for a moment and then I asked them, "Has anyone in this arena attempted suicide or dealt with recurring suicidal thoughts, as I have? Is anyone a cutter?"

The question hung in the air as the room fell very silent.

I said, "If you're like me, if you've walked this lonely, terrifying path, would you be willing to join me here at the front?"

I'll never forget what happened next. There was a tidal wave of women; stood from where they were sitting, and made their way to the nearest aisle. They came from all over the auditorium, over 400 of them.

As I looked out at my sisters, I swear my five-foot-four frame in that moment stretched to six feet, tip to toe because I thought Lord, this is a battle that in your name we're going to win.

With tears clouding my vision, I watched as these women came; all those flickering torches in search of the steadfast light of Christ. As women continued making their way to the area just in front of the stage, I reached out my hands as though covering them all, and I prayed to our great God and to Christ, the light of the world.

And let me just say right now if you're somebody who has struggled with that, I'm going to pray this over you because here's what I prayed. I asked God to shine his boundless light into your darkness. I ask the Father to breathe hope – to breathe hope into the stagnant filth of any despair. I ask that God's truth will penetrate any lies that you've believed for so long.

God is a faithful, loving companion, particularly on those lonely, dark nights.

And then I prayed those great words from Psalm 27, verse one, over them: “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

In the light of the Lord, fear is banished. In the strength of the Lord, strongholds are broken. In the arms of the Lord, there is safety. In the grace and mercy of the Lord, there is life.

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light,” said the prophet Isaiah; “On those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”

What this means for us is powerful for all eternity! For those who trust Jesus, there is nothing but life-giving light. Light that bursts forth in the darkness, making us squint our eyes nearly shut. Christ is healing us from here. In the middle of our mess, he is bringing beauty from ashes. Into our darkness, he is our light.

When my son Christian was a little boy and he would be finally tucked in bed at night after prayers and stories. I would walk to his bedroom door, stop, turn, and ask him a question: “Which boy does Mommy love?”

He would put his little hand on his little chubby cheek and with a big grin say, “This boy.”

Do you know what I would love to ask you to do? Every time you catch your reflection in a mirror, a store window, or even a puddle, would you ask yourself this question, “Which girl does Jesus love?” “Which boy does Jesus love?”

Then put your hand on your lovely cheek and say with absolute confidence, “This girl!” “This boy!”

You are loved – you are loved!

From that love comes life not just to us but to others. That's why we're here. Our presence should be felt in this world because Christ's alive. And there are some things that you and I can do right now. Would you watch this?

On the mission field

Open Captions:

>> I saw the problem coming. I knew my daughter might die. But with no food or money, I could do nothing. I buried her yesterday. She got sick and weak, and felt extreme stomach pain. My 11-year old son also died. He was crying, "Mom, I'm so hungry!" Then his younger brother

died seven days later. I had five children, now I am left with only two.

Announcer: In the relentless conditions of Southern Africa, Julia's story is not unique. In fact, Julia represents countless mothers who are fighting a near impossible battle to simply keep their children alive.

Open Captions:

>> We usually only eat three times a week because we can't find enough food. I feel horrible as a mother that I had to bury three of my children in the same year.

Announcer: Julia has endured the worst pain a mother can experience, burying not one but three of her children in the span of one year. But her story does not end here.

Open Captions:

>> I can see the symptoms of starvation in the remaining two, but I am praying they will grow up and live long lives.

Announcer: This faithful mother, along with a multitude of African mothers need our help. Let them say: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat."

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Can you imagine as a mom? And to hear her say, "I feel like such a bad mom." I've been there. I've watched what these mothers do. I've watched how hard they work. I've watched them literally digging in the dirt looking for anything that could be considered food for their children. She is not a bad mom. She is a mom who lives in a country where there is extreme famine and it is getting worse. To have to bury three children?

Sometimes you watch something like that and you think, how can that possibly -- I'm sitting in the studio here and you maybe are sitting in your home or wherever, how can that be going on at the same time? And here's my thing. If the body of Christ is alive and well on planet earth then that should not be going on because it is something that we can do something about.

Sometimes you'll hear of horrible earthquakes or tornados or terrible hurricanes and you think, there is nothing I can do to stop this. All I can do is be there in the aftermath to help. But this is a situation that we can do something about right now. We need to be active so that those children don't end up in the worst of the worst, malnutrition clinics. So that a mother does not have to kneel three times behind the grave of her child.

I don't know if you're flipping through channels and you're 12 watching this or if you're a faithful supporter and viewer but I just want to say every single one of us can do something. As long as that exists, as long as that is a reality, think of the money that is spent in our nation alone on diets, on diet books. And that mother hopes to be able to feed her children three times a week.

These moms are just like you and me. Somebody actually asked me once, "Do you think they get used to it over there because they see it all the time?" No! No! No mother would ever get used to their children crying out because they're hungry. Never! Never! Never!

So please, can we do this together? If you can do \$30 a month, that will provide for three children food for three months -- for \$30! You can't go and see a movie, get two movie tickets for that. For \$50, five children for three months. \$100, which many of us can do, ten children for three months. It will make such a difference. If everyone watching thinks, okay, I'm not just going to think well somebody else will do it. No, it is us. It is on us. We're here for such a time as this. It is no accident that we're alive when this is going on and you and I can do something.

If you can give an additional gift we want to upgrade our food factory in Africa so that it becomes much more efficient. So please, go to your phone and make the very best gift possible.

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: James and Betty, the last time we were in Mozambique together you took us and we went through the food factory that was built by the friends of *LIFE*, through their love and generosity; a factory that has helped saved millions of children's lives.

The needs have gotten greater. We've got to produce more food. We have to package that food more effectively. We need to be able to get that food to villages where Mission Feeding is not getting to today. Please James, help us today. Please, friends of *LIFE*, you can help us today by going to the phone, dialing that number or getting online and making the best gift that you can give, giving the gift of food, the gift of Mission Feeding to children that so desperately need it.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so, so much! If the lines are busy, please keep trying. Let's do this. Let's really do this and let the world know Christ is alive and well in his church. Not because we're sitting in a pew singing hymns but because we're reaching out in love in Jesus' name.

For any gift at all, I'll be thrilled to send you my brand-new book, *In the Middle of the Mess*. If you can contribute \$100 we have this -- this is so cool, this mug! It looks like just a black mug until you pour your hot tea or your coffee in and then ta-da! There you have it, the message for the day. Which I normally encourage you and remind you that we're actively standing shoulder by shoulder and walking out this life we believe in the name of Jesus. God bless you!