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Week 51: Fall Mission Feeding
Wednesdays in the Word: Sheila Walsh
Praying In the Middle of the Mess

Sheila: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. One of the things I love at the moment is I travel most weekends and it can be anywhere from San Diego to Tampa, Florida. But I love when I get to meet some of you face to face and you'll say, "I watch *Wednesdays in the Word*" or "I set my D.V.R." I just want you know, it means the world to me. I'm so grateful. It's nice too to be able to meet some of the people who have been such incredible supporters of everything we do here at *LIFE*. I want you to know even though we're so grateful for the way that you stand beside us and help us with water wells or with Mission Feeding, we want you to know we're here for you too. And that really is my prayer for *Wednesdays in the Word* that God would meet you exactly where you are right now in the way that only he can.

A couple of days ago I was talking to a young girl and she said, "The greatest challenge for me at the moment is, I love God but I find it really hard to pray." So I decided that that would be the focus perhaps for this *Wednesdays in the Word*. Think about prayer; it's a little word, only six letters but in terms of it bringing huge significance to our spiritual life it's really monumental and it brings up a lot of feelings when we start digging deep. You might think, I can't pray. You might feel even cut off by the enemy saying you're a terrible prayer. But it is so important. It is so important to our spiritual life. I want us to kind of start from the very beginning and take a fresh look to see what does God say to us about what prayer really is.

I read something fascinating the other day. A doctoral student once asked Albert Einstein, "What's left to do original doctoral research on? What is there that hasn't been covered that really matters?"

This is what Einstein said. He said, "Find out about prayer. Somebody must find out about prayer."

Let me tell you a little about my own journey. It might be similar to yours. I remember in my 20s, if you asked me about my spiritual life I would have said I love, love, love to read the Bible, I love to go to church, I love to worship but I was definitely challenged in my prayer life. I would get distracted.

In my 30s I would have said I was beginning to be more honest with God every day in prayer but

I had a hard time praying in front of people because I remember thinking, compared to her I stink at prayer.

Well, in my 40s I started to understand the simple profound gift of a daily walk with the Lord. Honestly, I stopped worrying about what other people thought and I just began to enjoy talking to my Father.

Understanding that I was invited to come as I am has made prayer an ongoing easier dialogue. Some days -- some days I have a lot to share with the Lord and some days I just listen. I'm just quiet in his presence.

I started out, I don't know if you journal but sometimes when I'm learning something I'll journal. I wrote down four truths that I discovered were helping me daily when it comes to my prayer life and I'm hoping perhaps it will help you.

So here's truth number one: Our father is longing to meet with us. It is not God wants you to pray to be a good Christian. He longs to meet with you. So we should listen and yearn for God's voice rather than just listing a page of requests to present to him. He's our Father. He loves to answer our prayers and give good gifts to his children. But more than any of that, he longs for a relationship with us.

Truth number two: No matter what our circumstances might suggest, God is still in control. It's tempting when trouble hits to question whether God is with us or whether he loves us. But I know this to be true, God is good, God is sovereign, he loves you, and even when life feels like it is a bit out of control, I promise you, God is still on the throne, God is still in control.

Truth number three: Let me just address that "stinking at prayer." You know what? It is not possible because if you think about it, prayer is just conversation with the one who loves us most in the world. You don't have to have fancy words or a special holy voice. You just come as you are. Your prayers are a gift to your Father and he gladly receives every single word.

Truth number four: It's never too late to start again. Perhaps you made a commitment in the past that you wanted to develop a faithful, disciplined prayer life and it just didn't work out. Here's the good news. You get to start again. And you get to start again. And you get to start again. I love this scripture: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.

I love that! Sometimes it is tempting to divide our lives into two parts, the spiritual part and then the rest of our life. I don't think that's the way God wants us to live. All of life is sacred and then we realize that God is always with us, that every breath can be a prayer. Prayer is not just a few

sentences we say to God when we talk to God while we're on our knees, but it is living out our ongoing, every moment commitment to God. Honestly, for me, I talk to the Lord all the time. When I'm driving up here to *LIFE*'s studios, I talk to the Lord. When I'm walking into a new situation where I don't know the people, I thank the Lord that he is right there with me.

I don't know how this sits with you. Some of you might be feeling, prayer is easy for me. I'm like hallelujah, wonderful! But others might be like the young girl I talked to a couple of days ago. She said, "I've been hurt and God didn't stop it. I feel kind of numb now. And honestly, if I'm really honest I feel angry."

Somebody else I talked to said, "I'm overwhelmed with everyday life and I don't think that I pray the way I should because I drop into bed every night exhausted." I think most of us can understand that.

Some of you might even question, is God even listening to me when he doesn't seem to answer in a way that makes sense? Well, I believe that God hears all our prayers, the good and the bad and is big enough to handle our honest questions and doubts. And I believe God is big enough even to handle our anger.

I remember the night when William, my father-in-law died. He had been living with Barry and our son Christian for a couple of years and Christian was probably about four or five at the time. Christian and I were the only ones home with William that night. Barry was out of town. William went upstairs to have a bath and then he was going to come down to say good night to Christian. When he didn't I was concerned.

So I said to Christian, "Stay there, baby. I'm just going to go check on your papa."

So I went upstairs and I knocked on the bathroom door. No answer. I knocked again. When there was no answer I opened the door and William was lying with his head in a pool of blood and I didn't know whether he had had a heart attack or had passed out. But I covered him up with a towel and I had my cell phone but even as I'm dialing 911 I can hear that Christian is coming upstairs and I don't want him to see his papa like this. So I'm trying to talk to the operator and saying to him at the same time, "Just stay where you are." But when I finally hung up I realized, there was Christian standing at the door looking at his papa laying on the floor.

He said to me, "Mom, what's wrong?"

I said, "Well, papa doesn't feel very well but we're going to get some help."

He said to me, "Can I help?"

I said, "Yes, you can."

It was interesting. I was five years old when my father took his own life and I was kept away from the funeral, I was kept away from the graveside and we never talked about it for years. I began to realize sometimes it is very important for children to be allowed to participate at an appropriate level when something major is happening that will impact their life.

So I said to Christian, "Why don't you get a wash rag and put it on your papa's forehead? And you just sit beside him and hold his hand and sing that silly song that you and he are always singing."

Well, finally help got there and they got William into an ambulance and Christian and I followed behind. When we got to the hospital we discovered that William had passed, that he was home with the Lord. And Christian was very quiet the whole way back in the car.

For the first few days and a couple of weeks, I guess, he did what I expected, he cried. He was so close to his papa. But then one day, I noticed him doing something that was very uncharacteristic of my son. We had adopted a humongous cat from the Humane Society and Christian pushed Lilly off the sofa.

I said to him, "Baby, are you angry?"

He said, "Yes, I'm angry. You told me mom, that God answers prayer. And when we were driving behind the ambulance I said, 'Please do not take my papa' and he did so I don't like God. And I'm not going to pray anymore."

I said, "You know what Christian? I totally understand that. And so does God."

You can take your honest grief to God. He can handle our anger, our pain, he actually welcomes it. Even if you're in a terrible place right now, I want you to know God is listening. He is a good good Father.

I never want to go back to the days where I used to edit my own prayers. I really think it would be an insult to God; raw emotion, telling God the truth -- which think about it, he already knows. But we tell God the truth full of that raw emotion. What you're actually saying to God is I trust you with everything that's going on in my life and I trust that you care. That's what our Father wants, an honest trust in who he is.

Sometimes now my prayers are very simple and straightforward dealing with the very moment

that I'm in. Other times my prayers are those that are intimate and raw, sometimes on my face on the floor calling out his name with every ounce of strength I have. Sometimes they're just one word which might be the most powerful prayer of all, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" There is power in the name of the Lord.

Here's the truth. I spent so much of my life trying to be good enough for God. I wanted all my ducks in a row before I ever came to him. I don't do that anymore because I love him and I know he loves me and I trust him. So now I come with honest and real prayer, honest and real conversation with my Father.

I think the greatest source of joy and peace in my life now is I have an absolute conviction I can come to God anytime, anywhere, just as I am and be loved -- just as I am and he accepts me. I can tell God my hopes and my dreams, my messes, my pain, my struggles, my disappointment, my hurts.

And this invitation that I offer to you today to deepen your relationship with God through talking with him honestly, all day, every day, comes with a little disclaimer if you like. There is much about prayer that is still a mystery to me. I don't always understand God's timing but I do trust his heart. So my plea to you is simple, take time to talk to God. Take time to tell him what's true and then take time to be quiet and to listen for that still small voice.

In First Kings Chapter 19, do you remember when the Lord came to Elijah? He had just seen the prophets of Baal destroyed but then he hears that Jezebel, Queen Jezebel is coming after him and he's spiritually exhausted; he is emotionally and physically exhausted. He runs way out into the wilds and he is depressed and he hides.

This is what God says to him: "Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. As Elijah stood there the Lord passed by and a mighty whirlwind hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose. But the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was a fire but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was a sound of a gentle whisper.

That's where God was. God wasn't in the wind or the earthquake or the fire. He came to Elijah in a gentle whisper. If you think about it, there is something very intimate about a whisper. It causes us to lean in.

Psalms 46, verse 10, one of my favorite verses says this: Be still and know that I am God.

Well, as a teenager, I used to struggle to be still. Until I began to understand the Hebrew root of be still means let go. Let go and know that I am God. Let go of what you're trying to control and

watch me move. When we hear that still small voice of our Father we can let go of all that's holding us back from an honest, raw, authentic conversation with God. God is listening and talking to us all the time. We only need to stop and listen.

I'm sure you'd agree we're living in challenging days: War, terrorism, cancer, heart disease, financial struggle, poverty -- I mean the list goes on and on. I think the bottom line is this: Life is hard. But God is good and he is faithful. And again, he's waiting for you and listening to you.

Remember, God is not interested in religion but relationship. God knows everything you're dealing with already and most importantly, right in the center of the tornados of our life he offers that quiet place, a shelter where he waits with open arms and an open heart to embrace us when we come to him.

Whether you are older or young, full of hope at the moment or full of fear, whether you feel joy as you think about the future, whether you feel angry and discouraged, this remains true: God is listening and he loves you right where you are.

I love what the scripture tells us. Hear these words and write them on your heart. This is Psalm 118 verse six: The Lord is on my side, I will not fear.

I love this. This is Psalm 27: The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

And then this, oh I love this! "Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you. I've called your name. You are mine. When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end because I am God, your personal God, the holy God of Israel, your savior. I paid a huge price for you. That's how much you mean to me! That's how much I love you! I'd sell off the whole world to get you back, trade the creation just for you."

I really encourage you to copy down a couple of verses and meditate on these words that give us strength and peace.

Here is the biggest hope of prayer for all of us. Prayer is a powerful tool in God's hand to transform us into his image. Perhaps that's why it is so important and why it's so hard. Remember Job? Prayer in the midst of his struggles threw him onto his knees and then onto his face. When he was finally finally able to stand again he was a totally different person. Do you remember what he said? "I heard about you before but now I've seen you."

I don't think it is possible to experience that kind of dramatic revelation of the character and power of God without honest, authentic, coming clean, telling God the truth.

I don't know where you are at in your life today. Maybe you think, you know what? I look around at everybody else and I'm not surprised that God is blessing their life. I look at my own life and all I see are the places I've failed.

I want to remind you that God is not sitting up there somewhere in the clouds waiting to hit you with something if you make a mistake. He is a Father who stands with his arms open wide. And the simple invitation is this, come as you are. Don't clean yourself up to come to me. Just come as you are.

Sometimes you just start with the name of Jesus, probably the most powerful prayer any of us can pray. When you begin to understand that your Father is listening all the time and longs not just for you to do the right thing, he just wants us to be intimate with him. He wants that kind of a relationship. Perhaps that will encourage you to just find a quiet place, get into his presence and listen to him love you.

One of the things that happens, I think when we begin to understand that God is with us in the middle of our mess, it means that we want to reach out to others when they're struggling and be an answer to their prayers. Let me show you something.

On the mission field

Announcer: As nighttime approaches the villages of Angola, uneasiness grips the hearts of mothers. They know all too well that in the stillness of the night there is nothing to distract their children from the gnawing pains of hunger.

Isak: As the sun is set here now and it's got dark, the reality sets in that nighttime is hunger time.

Announcer: For thousands of mothers each night brings back painful memories of children already lost to starvation and the fear of losing yet another child from lack of food.

Isak: It is when little children like Francisco many times cry themselves to sleep at night. Not because they're scared, but because their stomachs are empty. You see, this village doesn't have Mission Feeding. These children don't get a bowl of nutritious food each and every day. In fact, many times they don't get any food. Help us to break this cycle of poverty to insure that the next night is not a hungry night; that Francisco doesn't have to go to bed crying from the pain of hunger.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: I cannot imagine as a mother or a father watching your own child cry themselves to sleep because they're hungry. I remember when my son was just a little baby and he would cry at night if he was teething. I would do everything I could to try and make him feel better. But I cannot imagine what it would have been like if my son was crying because he was hungry.

What we're adding to these mothers and fathers, to their pain of watching their children suffer is a guilt of feeling like there is nothing more I can do. I've walked with these moms to places where they're literally digging through the earth to see if they can find anything at all that they can put into some water and make it into some kind of food.

The fact that some of those moms were born in parts of Africa and I was born in Scotland had nothing to do with either of us, it is just where we were born. But for those of us who have been blessed and have received so much, and particularly, think about it, around this kind of time of year, most of us overindulge. But when I see some of these children so desperately hungry, I want to do something and that's why I love -- I love what we do here at *LIFE Today*. I've been to the village where there is no program set up for Mission Feeding and it is heartbreaking. Some of those images will never leave me. But then I've been to a village where Mission Feeding is already in place. It is literally night and day, death and life.

That's what we're all about. We want to get as many villages as possible. We want to be an answer to the prayers of so many faithful moms who get down on bony knees at night and pray and ask God to provide something so that they can feed their children.

You and I can do it really for so little. Do you know that for just \$30 a month, that's not even two movie tickets these days, that will feed three children for three whole months! \$50, five children for three months. \$100 -- and many of us could do that -- \$100, but that will feed ten children for three months.

One of the other things that we've asked you to do in addition to that is we really need to do a food factory upgrade. We have an incredible factory in Africa that produces the food that is nutritionally perfect for the children. It is everything they need but it's getting old and it's out of date. So what we need is \$216,000 to be able to do the upgrade. So the way I break that down is that is like 216 of us who could give \$1,000. You couldn't all do that but some of us can. So Barry and I've committed, we're going to do one of those \$1,000. So we just need 215 of you to join us. So if you can do that, please do that.

With any gift at all, we're going to send you my brand-new book, *In the Middle of the Mess*, strength for this beautiful life. But please, don't put it off because you think, I can't do everything. If every single one of us does something we can change the world. So go to your phone, call that number on the screen and give 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

James: Here are two children at school. This little guy has got the United States flag on. I want our country to always be known as a country that gives life to children like these, not only saving their life from starvation but from malnutrition that keeps them from learning as they should. Everyone in the United States watching me right now, you have a chance to make a gift. And all our Canadian/Australian friends, United Kingdom, European friends, let's all help!

Would you right now go to the phone or go online and respond and make the best gift you can possibly make? Please do it! Don't turn away. Do what you can to help.

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much! Please keep calling. If you didn't get through, write the number down and keep calling until you get through. Those of us who have received so much from the hands of the Lord, it's the most natural thing in the world to want to reach out and help other children. As I say I will send you my book *In the Middle of the Mess*. Probably the most honest, transparent book I've ever written. We'll also love to send you these mugs that are so cool! -- A great message for you to wake up to every single morning.

I think we're so blessed to live in the nations where we live and I think those that have been blessed, who have received so much, it is not just our responsibility, it is our honor and our privilege to answer the prayers of some of these mothers.

I'm Sheila Walsh. Thank you so much for being with me on *Wednesdays in the Word*. See you next time!