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Wednesdays in the Word
Sheila Walsh: Prodigal Son

Sheila: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. I love that you stop by and join me every Wednesday. I'm so grateful. I want you to know I never take it for granted that you would make time in what I know is a crazy busy schedule. We all live such busy lives these days. Sometimes it is good just to stop for awhile. I just want to say I enjoy your company.

You might remember that previously we looked at the story of what we usually refer to as the story of the prodigal son. It is found in Luke Chapter 15. We looked at how this younger son totally disrespected his father, and yet the grace and love he received when he decided to come back home. It is a stunning picture of the way that God loves us even when we walk away from him. He waits for us, watching to see if today, if today is the day we turn our hearts back toward home.

Well, what about the other son? The one who stayed home with his father? I remember when I was a little girl my Sunday school teacher said she thought the prodigal son's older brother was just a really poor sport. Now his little brother had insulted his father, left the country, spent every dime he had. Then when everything was gone he came crawling home in rags. But she reasoned, if his own father could forgive his brother, why couldn't this boy?

Well, for I think a lot of reasons. It's a much deeper story than I'd ever understood before. But let's look at the reaction of the son. It is found in Luke Chapter 15 verses 25 through 30:

Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house and he asked one of the servants what was going on. "Your brother is back," he was told, "and your father has killed the fatted calf. We're celebrating because of his safe return."

The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him but he replied, "All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to do. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fatted calf."

You might remember that I said in a previous show there was no evidence in the original text that

the younger son spent his money immorally. The only place we see that is here and it is 100% just the older brother's assumption. He hasn't talked to him. He has no idea where his brother has been or what he did with the money. He is just so angry and judgmental that he automatically assumes the worst.

Let's try and put ourselves in his shoes for a minute. Your father is a wealthy, successful man. He's provided the family everything they need. Then one day your ungrateful younger brother dishonors your father, breaks his heart, takes half of everything, doesn't look back, leaves you with only part of the land that you used to own and most importantly, leaves you with a brokenhearted father. Think about it. You're the one that sits across from your dad every day at every meal. You see him in the field looking down the road wondering if today might be the day when his lost son will come home. Perhaps you feel like screaming, "I'm still here. Am I not enough?"

Well, weeks turn to months and you come home one day and you can hear something going in the house. You learn from a younger servant outside that your brother is back. But it is not just that the family's loser is home, he is already back in his old place as if nothing had changed. On top of that, he is now going to live off your half of the money. He's been forgiven and he didn't have to do a single thing to earn his way back to his father's love.

To make matters worse, there is a party going on and the calf they're eating should by rights be yours. You're so angry you can hardly breathe. Your father comes out and asks you to come in and join the party but you can't hold back. Your anger pours out at your father and you refuse to go in.

Let me try and put that in cultural context. In those days, for a son to refuse to attend a banquet put on by his father, it was the equivalent of breaking relationship with him. But that son had had all he could take. The only thing he could reason was this is not fair.

Perhaps you can relate to that. God, how can you be so unfair? Why did you bless that woman with a child while I prayed month after month and nothing? How could she be on to husband number two and I've not even had one? Would it be too much to ask to give me that job I've always wanted but instead you give it to her? How could you let my husband die? You are not fair, God. You're just -- you're just not fair!

Honestly, there is a deeper, more profound meaning to this part of the story that Jesus was telling. Unless we understand the culture of that day we miss the full significance of the older son's response. By refusing to come into the party he has actually disrespected his father more than the younger brother. See his brother did it in private but he is doing it in a public setting. Word quickly got around that the older brother was refusing to come in and join the celebration.

Now those listening to Jesus tell the story would be shocked by such an insult. In those days, if a

son behaved like that in public the father would be expected to have servants physically drag the boy into the house and lock him in a room. But that's not what this father does. His father said to him, "Look, dear son, you've always stayed by me and everything I have now is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day for your brother was dead and has come back to life. He was lost but now he's found."

The father leaves the party, leaves his guests and a son who has just come home and goes out to talk to this boy. Instead of being angry with him for publically embarrassing him, he calls him "dear son."

Well, this story was outrageous to the religious leaders who were listening because this part of the story was directed at them. Jesus was saying, "Yes, God loves sinners and God loves self-righteous people who don't see themselves as sinners at all." He showed equal tenderness to both. The older son was depending on his own righteousness, on everything he did right but the father, he was looking for relationship with both sons who in their own ways had broken his heart.

What the older brother missed is that the party, it really wasn't for the son. The party was for the father celebrating that one who was lost was now found. It was a loud glorious celebration that once more love won -- love won the day and another child is home. Unless we see ourselves for who we really are, we've got to remain on the outskirts of the party. In fact it is clear, we can actually be with the father all our lives but not be at the party that celebrates redemption. How tragic would that be?

When you understand how dark our hearts are without Christ it's overwhelming. Perhaps you're a little bit like me and as you read this story and dive deeper you see yourself in both sons. Maybe you've never rebelled that way but you point the finger at the one out there struggling with sin. But God -- God alone knows our hearts and our hearts are what he's after.

It's so easy in the days we're living in to point the finger at those who are clearly sinners. But this story reminds us that it is God's heart that we would all come home and celebrate the kind of love that would take a sinless savior to a cross so that a banquet could be spread for everyone -- everyone who would respond to the call to come home.

One of my most treasured possessions is a book by the Scottish writer, Ian Maclaren. It is titled: *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush*. I think I treasure it so much because it was given to me by Ruth Graham, the late wife of Dr. Billy Graham, and she inscribed a beautiful dedication inside the book for me. There are several stories in the book but my favorite story begins in a small Scottish town. It is the story of a father and a daughter. It is really a father and a prodigal daughter.

His name is Lachlan and Lachlan was a stern judgmental man who made life miserable for

everybody around him, especially his own daughter, his only daughter Flora. What made it even sadder is he did it all in the name of God.

One night he went to church and announced that he wanted to bring a matter before the church council. He told them a young woman had rebelled, left home and gone to live in London. Lachlan asked that night that this young woman's name be removed from the church role. When they asked for her name he told them it was Flora, his own daughter.

Well, the young minister took Lachlan into his study and asked him, "What happened?"

Well, Lachlan told him that Flora had left a note for her father telling him how much she missed her mother who died and it was clear to her that she was a disappointment to her father. She would never be good enough. She would never measure up to his religious standards.

So she wrote him, "I don't think I'll ever see you or my mother again, in this world or the next."

Her letter was smudged with her tears. Well, the minister refused to take her name off the church role. He told Lachlan, "This is not the gospel."

Lachlan said to him, "Well, I want you to know this. I have blotted her name from my Bible."

Well, meanwhile in London, Flora desperate, lonely, heard singing coming from open church doors as she walked by. She felt compelled to go in. She sat in the very back pew and listened as the congregation sang: There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. The sermon that night was on the prodigal son. The preacher kept repeating one line over and over, "You are missed. You are missed. You are missed."

In her miserable loneliness, Flora decided to head home. She had no idea what her reception would be. I think that's the fear of every prodigal, of all of us. What if we head home and we're rejected? But Flora took the next step and she got on the train to head north to her home in Scotland. It was dark when the train stopped at her station and Flora got off and began the long walk to her father's house. As she climbed the final hill and caught the first glimpse of home she saw there was a light on in the window.

See God had been doing a work in her father's heart too. The same night that Flora had been compelled, drawn into the church in London, a woman had confronted Lachlan and told him his shame was far greater than his daughter's. After all, she said, "Woe to us if our Father had blotted our names from the book of life."

God pierced this old man's heart and he left a light on in the window every night after that praying, praying that his darling daughter would come home. Well, the dog was the first to hear her footsteps approach the house and ran barking to the door. As Flora made it up the last few steps to her house, her father wrapped his arms around her neck and kissed her. Later that night he showed her what he had done by erasing her name from the family Bible. He said, "Flora, can you ever forgive me?"

Well, Flora asked for a pen and she wrote this inside that Bible, "Flora, missed April 1873, found September 1873."

Her father fell on her neck and kissed her. See, a selfish younger brother, a self-righteous brother, Flora, her father, every one of us, we can be sure of this, of the Father's invitation, "Come home. Come home!" Always waiting for us is a Father who runs to every lost child with love and mercy and welcomes us home.

Perhaps you see yourself more like the older brother. Maybe you've been at church all your life and maybe you've seen some other people mess up and think they could just get to come back and everything is forgiven. Maybe that offends you because you think I have done all the right things all my life and they just get to walk back in? Yeah, that's the outrageous grace and mercy of God.

But you see, only God, only his word, only the Holy Spirit can help us see ourselves as we really are. We live in a country where we're just getting angrier and angrier all the time. Just look through Facebook posts and people are tearing each other apart -- some in the name of the Lord. There is nothing about that that is the Father's heart. You see, the ground is completely level at the foot of the cross. There are not places where some of us get to stand a little higher than others. Every single one of us stands absolutely wretched without what Christ did for us on the cross.

So whether you're the one who really messed up and it is almost too good to be true that you'd be welcomed home -- one of the things I love when the younger brother comes home, the father immediately gives him a robe and sandals. He doesn't want to invite him into the house looking like he doesn't belong. He invites him into the house dressed in a beautiful robe and that's what God does with us. He doesn't leave us looking like sinners. We're dressed in the righteousness of Christ. If you're sitting looking at yourself from the mud that you're sitting in, it doesn't look very pretty but I want you to know when God looks at you he sees you through the shed blood of Christ which washes you clean.

One of the things I think is my favorite thing about everything I get to do out here, through here at *LIFE Outreach International* is that because of the love and the grace and the mercy, and what we learn from James and Betty, and what we get to do through teaching is that we get built up, we get made stronger. But then you remember that love doesn't just keep it to itself, love reaches out in

the name of Jesus and loves our neighbor as we love ourself. That's something we want to ask you to do today. Would you watch this?

On the mission field

Announcer: Areas of Southern Africa are currently experiencing one of the worst droughts seen in over 30 years, and as a result the usual crop harvest has failed yet again. Desperate for food of any kind, families living in the remote villages of Angola will try to eat just about anything but unfortunately, leaves and tree pods offer little nutritional value. The effects of this devastating drought are most obvious on the young children.

Isak: I'm here with a little girl called Adalena. She is just two years old and you can see from the color of her hair, from her extended belly, this child is not in good condition. Her health is not good, the reason being because she hasn't had good nutrition. This child has really suffered. This village just some months ago there were children that were dying here, dying on a weekly and a monthly basis as a result of malnutrition, starvation, simple lack of food.

And yet, thanks to you, thanks to the gifts that you've given, you've made it possible for us to bring Mission Feeding to her village. Her story is going to be a good story, a story of life rather than death.

But if you look just over my shoulder you'll see the valley behind me and just in that valley is a village where we were yesterday. It is a village where they don't have Mission Feeding and so children are dying. Mothers told us some had lost two, some three, one mother as many as five children to malnutrition. But it is so easy for us to change that. It is so easy for us to extend what we're doing here in this village.

The trucks are here. Our people are here. We're ready to do it. We're ready to extend Mission Feeding into their village, and to extend that life line. You can make it possible for us to end the cycle of death. Please help us today. Give the gift of life. Give Mission Feeding.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Right now some areas of Africa the drought and the famine are at record levels. It is absolutely a desperate situation. I was reading in Proverbs, Proverbs 19:17 says this: *Those who help the poor are lending to the Lord and he will repay you.* Then I read this, Proverbs 21:13: *Those who shut their ears to the cry of the poor will be ignored in their own time of need.*

We're not asking for the world. We're asking to change the world one child at a time as Isak showed us so clearly there; the difference between a village where there is Mission Feeding in place and a village where there isn't. I've walked those dusty roads and seen the difference with my own eyes. We can change this. This is not an overwhelmingly hopeless situation; it is desperate at the moment but when you and I determine that together we're going to do something, and we can do it really with very little if we all join in.

Do you know that just \$30 a month will feed three children for three months -- just \$30. \$100 will feed ten children for three months. That's an amazing thing. If you think, particularly at this time of year, the amount of money that we just kind of waste and not have much to show for it, to think that we're actually investing in the lives of children is amazing.

We also want to do something that's going to make a huge difference. We want to do a food factory upgrade. We have an amazing factory right there in Africa that produces exactly the kind of food that children in that region need. It has all the vitamins and minerals they need. So for \$216,000 we can do that very necessary upgrade. It is really an old system now and it will increase what we are able to put out by 50%. I know \$216,000 sounds like a lot but if 216 of us were able to pledge \$1,000 then it is very doable. So my husband and I, we're going to do that for one so we just need 215 of you to join us.

But we can all do something -- \$30, three children for three months. Would you please go to your phone? You can go online or you can dial that number on your screen but let's not allow these moms to lay their heads down at night praying that someone will care enough. Let's not be those who turn a deaf ear. Let's be those who respond in the name of Christ and do something.

So please, go to your phone, dial that number on your screen and give the very best gift that you can possibly give. We have some lovely things that we'd love to send to you that's just our way of saying, "Thank you so much."

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: Just remember we are able to feed, the missionaries are able to be here because of the love of God, not just in their hearts but in your heart, those of you who support *LIFE Outreach* and respond to *LIFE Today*.

Why don't you go right now to the phone or go online and make the best gift you can. Help us feed three, five or ten of these children? If you can help feed 100, well, do that. I don't know at what level you're led to participate but for the three children or the five or the ten children, it's important what you do today.

We are feeding kids because of the love of God expressed through people; really, a lot of them -- nothing wrong with you going and doing what you enjoy. We just don't need to forget the others. It's very important that you pray that everyone who can will respond. Don't just pray, be the answer to a prayer. Respond and make the best gift you can.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you, thank you, thank you! Really, I can't thank you enough. If the number is busy, write it down, please dial again. Let's press through. Let's do this! You and I, as the body of Christ on this earth at this time, it is not an accident, we're here for a purpose.

For any gift at all we'll send you my new book *In the Middle of the Mess* or you'll get that fun mug that does amazing things when you put hot liquids into it. Those are just little ways of saying thank you but more than anything we want to be busy, busy, busy doing the work of Christ. Jesus said that the way that we love God is with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and Jesus added, we love our neighbor as we love ourself. So thank you for caring. Thank you for going to the phones. You can go online but just give your absolute best gift possible.

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