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Week 7: WFL
Wednesdays in the Word
Sheila Walsh
The Gift of Grace

In the Studio:

Sheila: I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. Today I want us to talk about something that is one of my favorite things in the world to talk about and that is grace. Grace is a short word but boy does it weigh a lot.

Our son Christian turned 21 in 2017 but it made me think of -- going through all the photographs when he was a little boy, he had this thing that he insisted on every time one of his pets died no matter how small. It actually started with his very first little fish; that when he discovered that his fish was dead we put it in a little box. And we had a little ceremony in the backyard where we dug a hole and we put his little fish in there. And then my son would request that I would sing at *least* two verses of Amazing Grace. If the pet was slightly bigger than I had to do the whole jolly thing. But there is something about grace that I think if we as God's sons and daughters began to really understand the gift that grace is it would change our world.

The last year we saw a lot of anger and hatred, not just in the world at large but even within the church we saw so many people disagreeing with each other which is certainly our privilege and our right but so much of it was not done with grace. Grace is God's unmerited favor but I think perhaps we need to take another course, another lesson on what does scripture actually teach us about what grace really is?

One of my favorite authors, a guy called Paul Tournier, he has a book called *Guilt and Grace*. Here's what he wrote. Think about this: "The church proclaims the grace of God and moralism or legalism, which is the negation of it, always creeps into its bosom. Grace becomes conditional. Judgment appears. I see its ravages every day in all the Christian churches."

A counselor friend of mine who spent his years, probably spent 40 years counseling summed up his whole career this way. He said, "Two major causes of most emotional problems among evangelical Christians are these: The failure to understand, receive, and live out God's unconditional grace and forgiveness, and the failure to give out that unconditional love, forgiveness, and grace to other people."

We tend to categorize sin; that some sins are worse than others. But James wrote this: *For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws.* James 2:10.

I don't know if you've ever heard Steven Brown on the radio, he's fantastic. I was listening the other day and he told something that made my ears perk up as a dog owner. He said that his dog's vet told him this: "You can learn a lot about a dog's owner by studying the dog without ever meeting the owner."

I thought about that. I thought, what would the world learn about God just from studying us? If there was no Bible, if there were no writings to go to, if the world just had to study us to understand who God is what picture would they get of who our Father is?

I love the scripture that says: For from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

I think one of the stories in scripture that shows the way that Jesus unpacked grace more clearly than any other is the story of a woman caught in adultery. It is an interesting story. It is found in John Chapter 8. Let me just read a few verses.

This is from John eight, verse two: *Early the next morning Jesus was back again in the temple and a crowd soon gathered and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.*

Let me just pause for a moment there. Is there a more graceless act than that? A woman caught in the very act? If you go back to Levitical law, for a woman to be punished for that there had to be at least two witnesses. And not only should the woman be there but also the man should be there. There is no mention of the man in this story.

Let's read on: *Teacher, they said to Jesus, "This woman was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"*

Don't you find it interesting when religious people just kind of give you part of the truth? If you're studying the Law of Moses it was clear that was not the whole truth. Yes, the woman could be brought before but the man had to be there too. The very fact that they brought the woman alone, the Law of Moses said the woman should be allowed to go. But there is nothing worse than an angry religious crowd.

Let's read on: *They were trying to trap Jesus into saying something they could use against him*

but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer so he stood up and said, "All right. But let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone."

He stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this they slipped away one by one beginning with the oldest until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman.

I've heard Randy Robison say, he was talking the other day about the only person in that crowd who had the right to cast a stone was Jesus himself. He was the only sinless one. I find it really sad not just that they dropped their stones and left, I find it sad that they didn't drop their stones and come and kneel beside her. That's what grace would have done. Grace would have understood what Jesus was saying. Are you all so innocent? I think it would have been the most amazing thing if one or two of the elders in the crowd understanding what Christ was saying had dropped their stones and come and knelt in the dust beside this woman acknowledging our need is as great as hers.

But let's look at how Jesus finished his encounter with this woman. This is what it said in John eight, verse ten: *Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"*

"No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Now go and sin no more."

Interesting order of words there from Jesus. He said, "Neither do I condemn you. Now go and sin no more." We tend, I think in the church to reverse that order. We tend to say go and sin no more and neither do I condemn you. But the order of Christ's words here is really the heart of grace. Grace looks at us at our worst and says, "I don't condemn you either. Now go and live differently."

When my son Christian was about ten years old it was a particularly cold day in Tennessee and he asked me if I would make him a thermos flask of hot chocolate.

I said, "Sure, babe. What are you doing? Are you going outside to play?"

He said, "No mom. I have an announcement to make."

I was like, whoa! "What's that?"

He said, "Today I've decided I am running away from home."

Whoa! That's huge news. I said, "Do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?"

He said, "No."

I said, "Honey, did I say something? Did I hurt your feelings? Did dad say something?"

He said, "No mom. It's not that. But think about it. There's you, there is dad, there is the dogs, nothing *big* ever happens here. If I don't go now I'll never have stories to tell."

I said, "Yeah, that's an excellent point." I said, "Where are you going to go?"

He said, "North! I'm heading north."

I said, "What are you going to do for money?"

He said, "Don't worry, mom. I intend to return home on weekends." A huge relief to me as his mother.

So I made his thermos of hot chocolate and he put it in his backpack with his soccer ball, a couple of books, the dog's blanket. Pushed it all down there and then said to me, "Okay, mom! I'm off!" And he headed out the back door.

I called after him, "Traveling mercies!"

Well, I ran upstairs to the balcony where I could keep an eye on him. And we used to live in Tennessee kind of out in the country and I watched him walk all the way around the lake, up one side and down the other side until he came to this tree where he and his friends used to fish. He sat down, unzipped his backpack, spread out the dog's blanket, sat down, poured himself some hot chocolate and I imagine began contemplating life in the north.

I thought, now what do I do if he moves on? I need to keep an eye on him so I decided I would take the dogs for a walk. I tried to stay far enough back that he didn't see me. I thought, if he spots me, I'll just say, "I'm so sorry! I had no idea this was north." But I realized eventually he was coming home. So I ran back downstairs and I was in the kitchen and he came back and wandered through the kitchen and up to his room.

Well, that night when he was tucked up in bed and we had said our prayers. I said to him, "Christian, tell me about your adventure. Did you have a good time?"

He said, "I did, Mom. But I think I would have enjoyed it more if my bag wasn't so heavy."

I thought about that for a long time. I wonder how heavy your baggage is? Wouldn't it be sad to live this glorious, grace-filled, blood-bought life and make it all the way home and for Jesus to say to us, "Did you enjoy the journey?" For us to have to say, "I did, but I think I would have enjoyed it more if my bag wasn't so heavy."

What would it look like if wherever you are right now, I don't know whether you might be sitting at home, you might be in an office watching this on a computer, but wherever you are, if suddenly, all your baggage became visible? Everything that you've pushed down into the cellar of your soul and I don't know what that would be for you. It could be disappointment, anger, unforgiveness; it could be an abortion, an affair. It could be the things you've never told another living soul. But suddenly, as you sit here all your baggage becomes visible. What would that look like for you?

Perhaps you would be horrified to realize how much baggage you're dragging through your life. Or maybe it would make you sad to realize how long you've been carrying this baggage. Here's my question. If you saw it, would you want to take it home with you? Would you want to keep it? Or would you want to take Christ up on the most glorious offer you find at the end of Matthew Chapter 11? The last two verses say this. Hear them as Christ speaking right now directly to you: *Come unto me all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me because my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

Grace invites us to come as we are -- not as we wish we were but as we actually are. The hymn, Amazing Grace has always been one of my favorites and I think perhaps understanding when John Newton discovered that the life he had been living as a slave trader not only was the worst decision he could ever have made but when he understood that even though he had lived that life where he had cruelly changed the lives of so many, where he came into relationship with Jesus Christ and he came upon this staggering truth that although his life had grieved the heart of God that there was forgiveness; that's when he sat down and penned those amazing words, "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."

I wonder how it would change the face of our churches if we began to understand the kind of grace that Christ offers. If you look at the way that Jesus encountered so many individuals in scripture, what he offers was love wrapped in grace. It wasn't pretending that what we had done didn't matter.

When you look at Christ's encounter with the woman caught in adultery, he didn't ignore her sin, he didn't make it seem like it didn't matter, he simply wanted her to first understand, "I don't

condemn you. Now go and live differently."

When we reverse that order, when we make it so that everyone in our church has to dot all of their i's and cross their t's and have their ducks in a row before they're welcome, so often that's why so many people turn away because they think I don't belong here. It's the grace of God that transforms us when we understand that as we are we are loved.

I have a picture in my office at home that I love. I think Christian is maybe three or four at the time. It was during the years that I toured with *Women of Faith*; we were together as a team for 20 years. I don't think I missed one of those weekends. And for the first eight years of Christian's life he traveled with me every single weekend on the road.

On one occasion it was a birthday for one of the members of our crew and someone had made a really big chocolate cake. We all had some and then Christian kind of face planted in the frosting and he was just covered in it. So my mother-in-law, Eleanor, who had been with me said, "Listen, I'll take Christian back to the hotel and get him all washed up and have his bath and be in bed by the time you come home."

Well, I was speaking that night and I was wearing a cream suit. I remember it well because I never wore it again. Because I was about to go on the platform, they were just about to introduce me when I heard just behind me this little voice saying, "Mommy!" It was Christian. He hadn't left the building yet and he wanted just one more hug before he left. So I got down on my knees and I opened up my arms and gave him the biggest hug. And I knew, yes, I was going to get frosting on my suit and in my hair. And it was honestly really intentional. Because I wanted to say to my son, you don't clean yourself up to come to your mom because you don't clean yourself up to come to your father. You come as you are.

I don't know if that sounds too good to be true for you. You might be tempted to think, well, you don't know my story. No, I don't know your story but Christ does and that's why Jesus came. Maybe you've even just been flicking through channels and something made you stop. And you think, I don't think I even know this Jesus.

Do you know what scripture says? Those that call on the name of the Lord will be saved -- not might be, will be. Sometimes the most powerful prayer is simply one word, Jesus! If you don't know this Jesus today you can simply say, "Lord, I believe you're God's son. I believe you died. I believe you rose again. I know I'm a sinner and I ask you right now, would you forgive me? Would you make me part of your family?" And the amazing thing about the Lord is that he welcomes every single one of us home. That's what grace is all about. You get to come as you are.

If you prayed that prayer, we sure would love to hear from you. But I want you to know if you did, do you know there is a party going on in heaven? And your name is on every single one of the balloons. And when you've had your life literally changed, it makes you want to change the lives of other people and we're going to get to do that. I'm going to show you how. Would you watch this?

On the mission field

Jeanne: For years I've had the privilege of traveling with *LIFE Outreach* to the mission fields of the world. As a mom, I've rejoiced with mothers who now have clean water for their children. And I've grieved with mothers when we didn't get there in time to save their child from dying.

Recently, I met a young woman named Shantel. She is just a child herself, only 14, but Shantel is caring for her siblings as if she were their mother. As I visited with her, I learned why.

Open Captions: We lost our mother because of unclean water. She died with a swollen stomach. Since my mom's death, we've had such tragedy in our family. Our life is not good. Even my siblings are getting diarrhea from drinking unclean water.

Jeanne: I can tell how much she loves these precious ones in their laps right here. She wants the best for them. But when you know that the water they drink is the thing that killed her mother, only a month ago, it has death in it. They've already found that out. So we have a very desperate situation here. Let's take that load off of her. Let's don't send her to that dirty water anymore. Let's get water here for these precious children.

End of clip

[In the studio]

Sheila: Can you imagine? Can you imagine living in a place, living in a village where every single day the constant is a child is buried?

When I was watching that piece I was thinking, the things that are daily to us are so different. They're just simple things and occasionally sure, occasionally we'll face a difficult thing, a sickness or a challenge. But I cannot even for a moment, even though I have walked there and I've watched these moms and I've walked beside these moms and I've seen their tears, I've been

to the place where they've buried their children, I still cannot wrap my heart around what it would be like to open my eyes every day knowing that today someone else's child is going to be buried simply because we don't have clean water.

That just seems outrageous to me. As long as the body of Christ is still on this planet, that should not be happening. I think it is easy to point our fingers at governments and say what more they should do but honestly, I think, I don't want to point my finger at a government. I don't know all the intricacies of governments. What I do know is the mandate that Jesus Christ left for his servants, for you and I who love him, that we're to be his hands and feet, that when we offer a cup of water in Jesus' name it is as if we literally give it to him.

This situation at the moment is drastic but here's the amazing thing. We can do something to change it. For \$48 we can provide ten people with clean water for the rest of their lives; \$72, 15 people; \$144, 30 people; and for \$4800 you can put in a new well that will provide water for 1,000 people for a lifetime. That's why we call it Water for LIFE because these wells will last for about 70 years.

Yes, this situation is heartbreaking but we can do something. We can't all put in a well but if every single one of us decide we're going to do something and make sure that when that darling woman gives birth to her baby, when all these women in villages give birth to their children that they're born into a place where the daily thing is, I can go to a well, I can get clean water and I can watch my child thrive. Please go to your phone. Please dial the number on your screen. Make the best gift possible. Do it in Jesus' name.

[Begin video clip]

Announcer: Every day children living in extreme poverty are forced to make a dreadful choice, drink dirty polluted water filled with deadly disease or die from thirst. No child should ever be faced with this decision.

The good news is there is a solution -- Mission: Water for LIFE is one of the most proven and viable demonstrations of God's love in the world today. You can help end the suffering because clean water changes everything.

With your gift today, you can help drill 400 water wells in remote villages in over 15 nations. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five people, a gift of \$48 will help provide for ten, \$72 will provide for 15 people and \$144 will help provide fresh, life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime!

With your gift we'll send you *The Riches of Christ*, what true prosperity looks like filled with wisdom, prayers and scripture. James Robison adds insight from what God has shown him about finding contentment in the Father's provision for your life.

With your gift of \$100 or more please request the *Children of the World Storybook Bible*. This easy to read Bible features colorful art by children from nearly 50 countries around the world.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well. And you may request the "Bridge of Faith" framed canvas print by Thomas Kinkade.

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

[End of clip]

On the Mission Field:

James: Let me just say this about the well. Here we are in an area where over 2,000 children have just been fed but the whole thing started not only with a need for food but also providing water which became the center of life. Now there is a school here. So you've got school feeding, you've got fresh water. They're not only drinking it and the whole village here are using it as a water source but they're washing -- their desperate to clean up their dishes with clean water.

I'm telling you, the wells like this that you can have a part in of either giving the well or giving a portion of it, it changes everything in the entire area. If you can help give other wells here in Africa please do it because it is going to take all of us working together, and it takes people just like you providing as love provided here. Do what you can to help us drill more wells, please.

End of clip

[In the studio]

Sheila: Thank you so much. If the numbers busy please keep trying. Call that number on your screen. Go online and make the best gift possible. I remember when my son was just a little boy saying, "I wish we could give God something for his birthday." But you know this is something we actually get to do. Jesus made it so clear; whatever we do for the least of these we do it for him.

Can you imagine how glorious it will be the next time we're able to bring back some footage and we show you that clean water has gone in to 400 new villages? And the women and the children, and fathers and the grandfathers are celebrating because suddenly, where there was death now there is life. And we're doing it in Jesus' name.

So thank you so much. Remember, if you need us, we're here for you too. I'm Sheila Walsh. I'll see you next time on *Wednesdays in the Word*.