

3/14/18

Week 11: Mission: Rescue Life

Wednesdays in the Word

Sheila Walsh: The Power of Forgiveness

Sheila: Hi! Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. I'm Sheila Walsh. I have to tell you I'm excited about today's program because what I want to talk to you about, I really believe is a game changer. I also believe that it is contrary to who we are as human beings. So there you go. I want to talk about the power of forgiveness and the damage that unforgiveness does to us. I have been in ministry for many, many years and I think I could honestly say that unforgiveness in many places has really crippled the body of Christ. I want to talk to you about what forgiveness is and what forgiveness is not because I can even imagine some of you sitting there thinking you don't know what I've been through -- and that's absolutely true and absolutely valid. I think what we'll discover is that forgiveness is a gift from God to set us free.

I was invited some time ago to speak at a conference for pastors' wives; there were maybe 400-500 pastor's wives. There had been a session earlier on in the morning when they had been in with their husbands and they were having a big worship service. So I went into the room where I knew we would be meeting and I had little three by five cards and I got a couple of friends to help me put a card and a pencil on every single seat, and then to just kind of quickly ask God to touch the woman that would sit in that seat because if you are a pastor's wife, I can't imagine what a challenge that is. You have to listen to people complaining about the length of your husband's sermon or how your kids don't behave in church. I'm sure some days you just want to say, "Hello. We're a family too."

So I really prayed and asked God that he would meet the needs that I was unaware of. So I talked for a little bit and shared some of my own story and talked about what it is like when you feel as if there is not a safe place to tell your story. Then I said, "Okay, you'll see that there is a little card on your seat. What I'm inviting you to do," I said, "Don't put your name on it, but I want to ask you if there is something that today that you just want to acknowledge between you and the Lord, would you write it on that card?"

And I had brought this kind of large simple plain wooden cross. I said, "Once you've written that down would you come and just lay it at the cross." I said, "I promise that I will take every single one of them home and pray over them for the next seven days."

So one of my friends was playing some music and I stood back and watched as the women filled in their cards. Then we prayed a general prayer and the women were dismissed to go off and do

whatever the next thing on their itinerary was. So I gathered all the cards and I took them home and I sat down and for the next two or 3 hours I just read the cards. I have to say I'm no spring chicken so I've lived long enough to know that there's few things in life that surprise me but there really was that day.

I read one card that said, "I really believe that my husband's ministry would be stronger if I was no longer alive."

So many things that were heartbreaking. One woman said, "I had an abortion when I was in college. I never told anyone. My husband doesn't even know. But we're not able to have children and I'm absolutely sure that's why. I'm sure that God is punishing me."

As I prayed over each card there was such a thread that seemed to go through them all and it was this forgiveness issue. Some were saying that they can't forgive someone else for something they've done. One woman said, "I cannot forgive the people in our church or how they've hurt my husband."

But it moved away from just pastor's wife and pastor issues to just real men/women and their children issues. Some people were saying things like, "I can't forgive God. I prayed and I've asked God for something and I know it is not a selfish thing but God continues to be silent in the face of my prayer and I'm struggling so hard to forgive him."

Maybe some of the saddest ones were those that said, "I can't forgive myself." One woman said, "I had an affair and I confessed it to my husband and he was heartbroken but he forgave me. We've gone to counseling and I know that he still loves me. The problem is I can't forgive myself."

And I could hear -- because sometimes you hear something or even if it just looks like words on a paper but you hear the heartache behind that. It reminded me of a C.S. Lewis quote; I'm a big C.S. Lewis fan. But he said in one of his books, "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something or someone to forgive."

And it brought me back to memories of one of my very first tours as a contemporary Christian artist in America. My first tour was opening for a guy called Phil Keaggy. Some of you might remember him, one of the best guitar players I've ever met. But then I had my first album out because yes, it was albums back then. And it did really well and I had a number one radio hit and so we did a tour. We toured I think like 40 different cities across America and I brought my British band with me. It was a great tour. Some places like Florida and California were just huge venues. By the end of the tour I just was so grateful for everything that God had done until I realized that the guy who was our promoter, who had sponsored the whole tour had disappeared

at the end with all the money. He hadn't paid the lighting company, he hadn't paid the sound company, he hadn't paid any of my band. They were all like married guys with wives and children who had sacrificed to be on the road with me for seven or eight weeks.

I remember calling him and saying, "You told me you are a brother in Christ. How could you do this?"

He said, "Honestly, I don't really care. And if you sue me, I'll just file for bankruptcy and I'll start up again tomorrow under a new name."

It was devastating. So the only thing I could do, honestly was I flew back to London where I was living at the time and I sold my house and I paid the lighting company and the sound company and all the band guys because I thought, there is no way I'm going to let these people suffer because of working with me and what had happened.

The Lord kept bringing this huge amount of money that was now gone. I had to move in with a friend for two years. I had to live in one room and it really, really bothered me. Then one day I felt as if the Lord said, "Listen. Sheila, you can live the rest of your days thinking that this guy stole that amount of money from you or you can exchange that and live under the understanding that you have given me this money and I will honor you because of it." So it was -- I felt like I was finally free. I was able to say, okay, Lord, I give that to you. Thank you that I was able to take care of my band and all of the other people. So thank you for that.

So I thought I was done. But I wasn't. A couple years later I was at something called the Christian Artist seminar which took place in Estes Park in Colorado every year. I was walking across to go and teach at a seminar and suddenly, I saw him coming right toward me. Yep! It was the guy that had gone away with all the money. He saw me at about the same time that I saw him and he stopped and he turned and he ran away from me.

I fell on my knees in the grass and I said, "Lord, I don't understand this. I thought I'd dealt with this. I thought that I'd forgiven."

You know what the Lord said to me? "You forgave the debt, you didn't forgive the debtor." I could feel something kind of rough under my knees and it was a stone. I felt as if the Lord said, "I want you to pick up that stone and I want you to carry it with you for the rest of your life because I want to remind you, remember what Jesus said to the crowd that dragged that woman who had been caught in the act of adultery and they threw her down in the middle of a crowd? And Christ said, 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.'" The only person in the whole crowd who had earned the right to cast the first stone was Christ himself. He was the only one who hadn't sinned. I have to tell you, God set something free in me that day.

My son, when I've been watching him through all the stages and ages of life, he is 21 now, but I remember when he was little and he would argue about things, "But, mom, that's not fair! Why did that happen?"

I totally get it. Which one of us doesn't want life to be fair? There are some things that happen that you think, God, how do you hold your hand back? How do you allow that to happen? One of the things that I shared with my son over and over again, I think I may have even shared it with you before on the program is this: Fair doesn't live here but Jesus does. And forgiveness, it's not something that God wants to make you do so you can be a good Christian. Forgiveness is God's gift to us to live in a world that is not fair.

See, here's what I love. The enemy has nothing in his arsenal to combat forgiveness. Forgiveness is an absolute act of defiance against the enemy and how he wants to drag us down. When we choose to forgive because it has to be intentional, it is not something you just sit around and wait to feel like you -- if you wait until you feel like you want to forgive, you'll be waiting until you hear the trumpet. To me, forgiveness is something that is part of the spiritual discipline of dragging my will in line with the will of God and saying, "I choose to forgive."

Some of you might be thinking, but you don't know the depth of what was done to me. I know that's true. Some of you have texted or sent little messages on Facebook and shared some of the things. One woman, she said, "I've been married for 33 years and last week my husband said, 'I don't think I love you anymore.' And has gone off with some younger woman in our church." How do you get over that? It's so unfair. She was there all along helping him build up his ministry, sacrificing so that he could do what he felt called to do. At this stage and age in life where she should be able to sit back and relax and enjoy what God has given them, suddenly, the house is sold and she is out on her own.

That kind of thing, it's -- it makes you want to cry after God and say, "How can you allow it?" Those are the times when I have to remember that you and I we're not normal -- look at me, and think, I know you're not normal. But we're not regular people, we are resurrection people. We are not living for what we can see right now. If we're living for what we can see right now then we're in trouble. But we're not. We're living for what we cannot see with our eyes at the moment. But one day you and I will be free. There will be no more sin, there will be no more shame, no more tears, no more sorrow, no more cancer, no more death, all of that will be gone.

I love in Hebrews where the writer to the Hebrews talks about fixing our eyes on Jesus, Hebrews 12: *The perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is now seated at the right hand of the Father.*

I'm just wondering, what's the cross that you're bearing at the moment? It's interesting, if you look at that little word *endured* in the original Greek text it means to stay in a place longer than expected. Maybe that is just right where you're living right now. Have you been carrying this cross way, way longer than you thought you would have to? Despising the shame? When you unpack that in the original Greek text it means to pay little attention to. It doesn't mean that Christ ignored the shame because there was no more shameful death for a Jewish person than to be hung on a cross. Deuteronomy said, "Cursed is he who hangs on a tree." But Christ did that for you and me, he paid little attention to the shame because he fixed his eyes on the joy that was set before him.

I read a book the other day by a missionary. Her name is Rosalind Goforth. She and her husband were missionaries in China for quite some time. In her book, it's called *Climbing*, she talks about an incident and she doesn't go into the details of exactly what happened, it is obviously very painful for her. But while on the mission field someone, I'm assuming one of the other missionaries did something that impacted she and her husband in a devastating way. It wasn't a light thing, it wasn't a little thing it was something that really impacted their lives.

I want to quote her exactly because she talks about coming to a place in her life where she feels there is no power left. She doesn't feel the presence of Christ. When she prays it feels like her prayers are going no higher than the ceiling. So she began to ask God, "What is it? Why have I lost all the spiritual power in my life?"

This is what she says in her book, "Unmistakably came the inner voice, 'Write to' and then the name of whoever it was, 'Write them and ask forgiveness for the way you have treated him.'" She said my whole soul cried out never! Again I prayed as before and again the inner voice spoke clearly as before, and I cried out in my heart, never! Never! I will never forgive him. She goes on to say she was actually willing to give up the ministry because she thought if it depends on me forgiving this person for this unforgivable thing they've done then I'm ready to walk away.

But here's what happened. One night she was reading to one of her children from the book, the great classic by Bunyan, a *Pilgrim's Progress* and came to the passage where it says this: "Surpassing in which a man in a cave moans, I have grieved the spirit and he is gone. I provoked God to anger and he has left me."

She said she immediately fell to her knees and begged God to forgive her for what she had held on to. She had clutched on to that stone and was not willing to drop it. She wanted to throw it. She immediately went to the other room and she wrote a long letter to this person and said, "Please forgive me." She didn't mention what he had done. Please forgive me for how I have treated you."

In her book she goes on to talk about the freedom that came. She said, "My joy came back into my life in a way that I hadn't even known before."

So here's what I think. Why don't you, at some point today go outside and find a little stone, it doesn't have to be as big as mine, find a little stone and keep it with you and every time you're tempted to say no, I can't forgive, remember what Christ did. And by His grace we're able to drop our rocks. And when we forgive, we are the ones who get set free.

It's so interesting that we're talking about this today because I had the privilege recently, very recently, of spending some time in Southeast Asia with some people who are literally in a prison and who are crying out to be free. I think you and I can help them. Would you watch this?

On the mission field

Open Captions: Over 4.5 million women, girls and boys are currently victims of sex trafficking.

Sheila: It's really easy to get overwhelmed here. You just see the tremendous need, the numbers of girls who need help and sometimes allowing yourself, allowing myself to be overwhelmed, it kind of shuts you down. But then as I read the way that Christ was with people, Jesus is a people person and Jesus said the Son of Man has come to seek and to save those who are lost. That word *lost* in the Greek means ruined, devastated, broken beyond repair.

Song:

Come to me
I'll be your refuge
Hide under my wing
Rest your head
And don't you worry
Don't you worry, dear

Sheila: I believe with everything in me that Christ is able to reach the most lost, the most devastated. Do you remember what it says in Romans eight? Paul says, "I'm convinced that nothing, not death, nor life, not heaven, not hell can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Song:

Come to me
I'll be your refuge
Hide under my wing

And don't you worry
Don't you worry, dear

Sheila: Jesus' message has not changed. He hears every voice in the middle of a noisy crowd and he says, "Bring them to me." That's what we're doing. We want to bring them one by one to Jesus and together, you and I can do that.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: This last trip that I was on to Southeast Asia was literally life changing. I'd been -- before on trips I'd seen some of the girls who were working the streets, that were working these bars and it was heartbreaking. On this last trip I didn't spend time with one girl who was over 14, they were 10 and 11 and 12. And in that part of the world, when you're born, you're considered a year old. So somebody who is ten there is nine to us. They were literally children.

After the first day of spending some time with three or four of the children and hearing their stories and how they ended up there because sometimes you might think, well, why are they there? Why don't they just leave?

One of the girls I spoke to, she is 12, she is the bread owner for the family. It's unbelievable. Her dad is in prison. Her mom ran off with a younger man leaving a baby; the baby is ten months old. So this 12-year old is the bread winner for the family. So what she does is she goes out at night and she gathers cans because for eight empty cans she can get a quarter. The trouble is the only place she can get those cans is at night when they throw all the beer cans out. So she goes out from 10:00 at night till two in the morning and that was when she was snatched. And she woke up the next morning locked in a room with some older man beside her.

And it's like, I went back to the hotel that first night and I lay on the carpet and I sobbed. But there was a point when I felt the Lord said to me, "Sheila, get up and dry your face and you be a voice for these. You go home and you tell my people, this is happening."

When Isaiah spoke about Christ the Messiah coming he said, "To free the captives." Those captives still exist in our day and as long as you and I, the body of Christ are on this planet, we have to say, "No! Not on our watch. We're not going to let this happen." We have to let righteous anger rise up. The people who are profiting by billions from these precious little lambs are organized so you and I have to be equally organized.

We have some amazing friends at this ministry who have said, "Listen. We will give \$320,000 to

match gifts." Usually if you give a gift of \$128 that will rescue one girl but because of this matching gift, if you can give \$128 you will rescue two of these precious little girls. Maybe you think, well, I can't do that. Could you do \$64? If you could do \$64 we'll match the \$64 and together you'll have rescued a girl from the very pit of hell. We can do it. I know we can do it.

So please, go to your phone, call the number on your screen. Make the best gift you can do possibly and let's reach, rescue and restore in Jesus' name.

[Begin video clip]

Announcer: Innocent children and young people longing to be loved and cared for are being abducted and sold at the hands of violent predators; their spirit and bodies broken under horrific emotional and physical abuse. Through Mission: Rescue Life you can reach out to warn children vulnerable to sex traffickers. You can help rescue those already enslaved. And you can help restore young lives and give them a future.

And now a generous opportunity of a \$320,000 matching gift means your gift of \$128 to help rescue a child will be matched to help two children. Your \$64 gift will be matched to help rescue one child from the horrors of human trafficking. And a \$32 Rescue gift will be doubled to \$64.

With your gift we'll send you *The Age of Promise*, Randy Robison reveals ten promises woven through all of scripture that will transform the way you view God, yourself, and others. With your gift of \$128 or more you'll receive "The Prayer is Powerful" wood plaque. This unique scripture art piece is printed on premium Birchwood, a beautiful reminder of the power of prayer.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280, which will now help rescue 20 children and you may request the beautiful "Bridge of Faith" framed canvas print by Thomas Kinkade. Please call, write, or make your secure gift online today.

[End of clip]

On the mission field

>> You know if you walk around the streets of India there is tons of people but you'll very rarely see little girls because by the time they reach two or three they are taken and they're trafficked into the red light district.

You know I was talking to some of the little girls before. They told me that men that should have

seen me as a child were abusing me and doing terrible things to me. They told me of stories of girls that they knew in the area that had been murdered there.

I was horrified when I learned that over one million children are trafficked every year. That's two children per minute. That's unacceptable. We cannot live in a world that tolerates that. It's there because we tolerate it. We have an opportunity to come in and help. We have an opportunity to stand in the gap and stand for these daughters. These daughters don't have fathers that stand up for them. They don't have men and women that stand up and say, "This is wrong." We have an opportunity to do that.

Please if you can right now go to your phone or go to the internet and make the best donation that you can. By doing that you will be saving lives of girls all over the world who don't stand a chance without you.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you! I know I probably sound urgent but that's how I feel because I'm going to go back again and I want to know that I can go back and say to some of our missionary partners who are on the ground there, listen, maybe I'm here with just a crew but there is a whole army behind me. So please, if you tried to call and the number was busy, please keep calling. Let's do something – if every one of us does something it will change the world.

The Bible says that he who has been forgiven much loves much. Because we have been forgiven, we've got a lot of love to share; in Jesus name.

Thanks so much! See you next week on *Wednesdays in the Word*. God bless you!