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Week 12: Mission: Rescue Life

Wednesdays in the Word

Sheila Walsh: Fully Known and Fully Loved

Sheila: Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. I'm Sheila Walsh. I'm so glad you joined me. One of the things that is fun is as you probably know, I travel quite a bit. I'm on the road quite a lot. Every single weekend I get to meet some of you face to face and I love that! One of the things that happened just a couple of weeks ago was someone talked to me about how hard it is to come to terms with the things in your life that weren't the way you hoped they would be.

She was talking about the fact that her father was a very abusive father and she had prayed that before he died that somehow there would be some moment of kind of reconnection or just that she would hear these words from her dad, "I'm sorry." He was very sick and he was in the hospital. And she said, "It took all of my courage to go see him and it didn't go the way I thought it would go. It was so hard. He just remained hard and angry to the very end." I think that's a hard thing.

I was home in Scotland not so long ago for my mum's funeral and God gave me a kind of unusual gift that helped me see the parts of my heart that really still needed healing at a deeper level.

I never knew my dad in his good days. At this point in my life I've come to grips with that. I have a few photographs but no real present memories of the happy dad he was before his brain injury. Well, this being the case, on the day of my mum's funeral, as I said I was given kind of a rare gift. We invited all the people who attended her service to join us for a reception in a little hotel in Ayr, Scotland and I moved around the room; I wanted to make sure I said hello to everyone and thank them for coming.

Well, I saw a gentleman I didn't recognize getting ready to get up and leave so I went over and I introduced myself and I said, "Thanks so much for coming. I'm Sheila, Betty's daughter."

He said, "Oh I know who you are, lass. You did a beautiful job in the church today. Paying tribute to your mother couldn't have been easy."

Well, I thanked him for his kindness and I asked him, "Were you a friend of my mum's?"

He said, "No. I was a friend of your dad's, lass."

I honestly couldn't tell you what that did to me because I've *never* met any of my dad's friends. After my dad's death we moved to another area of town. It wasn't so far away but my dad was -- he had one brother we never knew, his dad had died early, his mum died before I ever met her. And even though we were just 50 miles away to where the rest of my mum's family lived, that's where we moved, it wasn't very far geographically but it put a gap, we didn't have a car in those days so I literally never met anyone who knew any dad. My mum moved because she felt there were too many terrible memories for her in Cumnock, the place where we were born.

As I said my dad had no family left to tell me anything about, what was he like as a boy? I have no photographs of my dad growing up, nothing to give me any kind of insight into his personality. There in that hotel was somebody who knew my dad and he was getting ready to leave. So I kind of ran after him and I said, "Could you just stay for a few more minutes?"

But he told me that he was sorry, he had to go, he had a bus to catch. He paused for just a moment and he took my hands in his and he said, "You've grown into a beautiful woman. I knew your dad very well. He would have been so proud of you." With that he was gone.

I know he meant those words as a gift but at that moment they felt like a knife in my heart, thinking that if my dad had lived, he was saying he really would have loved you. Well, I didn't go back into the dining room. I found a little privacy in the ladies' room. And that stranger's words rang over and over in my head. I longed to hear those words all my life but I wanted to hear them from my dad, not from someone who was his friend.

Well, there was nobody else in the restroom, so honestly, I put into practice something I believe in and that is honest confession before God. So I did that out loud. I just said, "Father, that made me so sad. Dad would have been proud of me? How would that have changed my life?"

I talked on and on and spoke everything out, everything I felt because what I've learned at this stage in my life is that God is our safe place. I've learned to confess everything, all my secret pain, all my unspoken hurts. And it doesn't mean that there won't be pain ahead, it just means I don't keep it hidden any longer. I bring it into his presence, the sorrow, the questions, the anger, the sadness. I bring the joy and the laughter too. Every emotion, everything I'm feeling, every thought is welcomed by your Father.

In that moment, this little restroom in the West Coast of Scotland became a safe place to pour my heart out to my father. Then I just sat quietly for awhile. I remember closing my eyes and asking

God to speak to me in the darkness. And in the stillness -- I never heard the audible voice of God but in the stillness I heard my Father, my heavenly Father speak to the deepest place inside me saying, "I'm proud of you. I love you so much. I've never missed a moment of your life. I've been there all along. And not only that I'm here right now."

Something I realized at that moment is that's what I'd been waiting for. It's what I wanted to hear and know. As I raised my arms up as if in worship -- actually, it felt more like a daughter raising her arms to her dad so he would pick her up. In that moment I knew I could let go of all the anger, the sorrow, the pain, and it felt like what took its place was not happiness, it felt like joy -- pure undiluted joy.

I sat there for awhile and I thought back on so many moments when I thought I'd been alone. I remember summer camp one year when the dads were invited to spend the day with their kids and I hid in my room till it was all over. I remember walking along the beach when I was 16 years old, my mum was in surgery, I knew it was serious and there was a possibility she wouldn't survive and I was so afraid I'd be left completely alone.

So many of these key moments in my life played out before my eyes kind of like an old black and white movie. I realized, I've always seen myself as a lonely girl. But there I was just seeing the truth. Although many moments in my life I felt lonely and scared, the truth is for me and for you I've always been a well loved girl of God. And though these feelings of loneliness were familiar I was coming to an understanding just because and this is huge -- just because a place has become familiar, it doesn't mean that's where you belong. Just because a place has become familiar doesn't mean it's where you belong.

John the beloved disciple wrote, *"God is light and there is no darkness in him at all. So we're lying if we say we have fellowship with God and go on living in spiritual darkness. We're not practicing the truth. But if we're living in the light as God is in the light then we have fellowship with each other and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."*

This letter from John is soaked in the love of God. That same John who walked along the shores of Galilee, who leaned his head on Jesus' breast like he was his little brother, who refused to leave the site of the brutal crucifixion, that same John who saw the risen Christ is writing to you and me to tell us beautifully about how we might have continuing ongoing fellowship with our Father. The E.S.V. translation of verse five puts it this way: This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

The word *message* he uses at the beginning of this verse is only used twice in the whole New Testament. It's the Greek word *aggelia*. It's related to the word *evangelion*, meaning the gospel, the life-giving gospel. The message of Christ, the good news is not to be ever used to bruise and

to condemn but to give life -- real lived out loud life.

The Aramaic translation of verse five reads like this: *This is the hope that we heard from him and give you hope because God is light and there is absolutely no darkness in him.*

John heard Jesus talk about this hope. He saw the hope of hopes within his own eyes. John saw the darkest days of Christ's life, those days and after his death, he also saw how the light of God beat that darkness in Christ's resurrection. He knew that the hope and light of God our Father is limitless. Hope and light of God is all good news.

I don't know about your story. Perhaps one of your parents made you feel like a disappointment. You will never receive that soul crushing message from God. His only message to you is hope and light. Maybe you were abused by someone close to you and you think, how can I trust God? Our God will never ever harm you. He is a restorer of hope and light to the darkened broken heart.

Perhaps like the woman I told you about at the beginning, perhaps your life has been peppered with disappointment. Maybe unlike her, maybe it's nothing life altering but it just keeps happening. It's so hard to bear because it is one more disappointment after another and you're like really Lord?

Or maybe you compare yourself to other women and feel like you don't quite measure up. That's one of the hardest things when we compare ourselves to each other it is crippling. Maybe even this morning, maybe you lost it with one of your children and now your heart condemns you. Well, in those moments he comes to you and says he loves you. You are his dearly loved daughter.

Whatever the baggage you've carried inside for so long, whatever darkness you've held onto it is time to invite the light of God into the darkness. And when you walk in his light when nothing -- absolutely nothing is hidden from him you've discovered that ridiculously truth-filled glorious statement that as you are right now God loves you just where you are.

It is hard to take in because you're not going to find that anywhere else on this earth. All human love has limitations and conditions. Not the father. The beauty of his love, of the grace he extends to you and I right now means he will never leave you there. Bringing your personal darkness into the light of God might be difficult at first, like coming out of a midday matinee. You know what it's like when you walk out into the sunshine and it's like whoa! That kind of light can be blinding. But John makes it so clear. We'll either follow Christ in the light or we'll turn away and walk on in our own darkness.

The invitation, the truth of the gospel is simple. Come as you are, walk with me, and be fully known and fully loved.

John didn't stop there. He goes on to say, "If we're living in the light as God is in the light then we have fellowship with each other."

That's what makes it possible to have true fellowship; a true community of people who are unafraid of bringing their pain, their wounds, and secrets into God's light together are people who are unafraid of sharing their brokenness with each other. When you and I begin to grasp how much -- how much God loves us, even in our brokenness, then we're able to love each other to have real fellowship. And when we love each other this way, then we get to encourage each other to keep walking in the light of truth.

In the weeks and months following my mum's death, I began to lean on the truth of God's word in a deeper way than I think I ever had. We have a little patio in our back yard by our garden and we have a little fountain where the water gushes out from the lion's mouth. I began to just sit there every day with my Father. I would bring my Bible, a journal, a pen, a hymn book, and a very large cup of coffee and I would have a worship play list on my iPhone. And morning after morning I brought everything I could think of that was still living in darkness inside me into the light of God's love. And I listened as he reminded me that even in the darkness of my depression I was well loved. I still go to that same chair every morning. Some mornings I'll read from the hymn book and let the words wash over me; words like: O love that will 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. O joy that seekest me through pain I cannot close my heart to thee. I trace the rainbow through the rain. I feel that promise is not vain, that morn' shall tearless be.

I read through the Psalms, often making my way back to Psalm 23. I love it! I find such companionship there. It is believed that Psalm 23 was the very first Psalm that David wrote when he was just a little shepherd boy. Many mornings I'll read it as if he is my little brother. He's sitting right down on the grass beside me telling me what he's learned from our Father. David will sit there and he will say to us, *"The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths bringing honor to his name. And 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. And 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."*

Before David every faced Goliath or King Saul, David made a daily practice of singing out his

heart to God, with only the sheep and the goats as an audience. He could never have known what a friend he would be to you and me, what an example he would set. I sing along with him many, many mornings or make up my own tunes because I can't quite hear his harp. But I hear his heart and I join in.

There is something beautiful about the practice of confession and then meditation to build strength into our lives. I encourage you today, find a quiet place where you can pour out your heart to God. Then perhaps you'll hear some things that are God's heart for you and I to do. Watch this.

On the mission field

Announcer: Behind the bright lights there is a darkness where a world of violence and sexual abuse runs rampant scarring the souls of millions of young girls.

Open Captions:

>> My name is Srey Pao and I'm 14 years old.

Announcer: Srey Pao is a child who was born into poverty. She told us that many in her family are very sick and to help them she looks through garbage for anything to sell but it is never enough.

Open Captions: Then someone told me there was a better job but they took me to another place where I was sold into slavery. I am forced to drink and have sex with many men every night.

Announcer: She says they threaten to kill her if she does not do what they say. Srey Pao is torn between needing to help her family and wanting out of her horrible situation.

Sheila: This cannot be their future. I feel that once we know something you can't unknow it and it is why we are here on behalf of *LIFE Outreach International* because we have to reach these girls before we can rescue them, before we can restore them. That's our commitment to these girls -- that's why we're here because we have to change that.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: That little one that I was holding there, I held her for a long time. She held on to me

and then she said, "Do you have to leave?"

I said to her, "I have to go back home but I promise you, in my heart you're coming with me. I will not forget about you."

We're not talking about women who just thought, oh I want to make a lot of money so I'm going to go into the sex industry. No! That is not what we're asking you to help us with. What we're asking you to help us with are little children who have found themselves either because they don't have parents or every single girl actually that I met had no school education; they can't read and they can't write so they can't get a regular job. So they're out in the streets and they're trying to gather cans and that's so often when they're snatched by these people.

One girl that I met had been locked up for a year and she said if I don't do what they tell me to do they hit her with electrical wire. It just broke my heart because she could have been my daughter. They're just little girls.

The thing that's amazing to me is that we can do something. If I just went and saw that and then came home, I don't know how I would cope with that. But I know that we can make a difference. I've met, I've worked with, I've walked side by side with, I've cried together with our partners who are boots on the ground there right now.

What they've said is, "Sheila, if you can go back and share what's going on. You saw it with your own eyes, you heard with your own ears, if you can go back and tell people..." because there are so many more who need to be reached because that's the first step.

I don't want some of these kids to end up in these horrible places. If we can reach them before that, go to their villages; we have programs set up to take these amazing presentations into every little remote village and say to the kids this is what to watch out for. So we reach them. But then some of them are already in the places where you saw. Then we want to rescue these kids, get them away from those people that exploit them day in and day out. And then, the final piece of that puzzle is to restore them.

Here's our prayer. We want and it is our commitment to restore up to 5,000 children this year and the only way we could do it, we're actually aiming at 2500 but we have some amazing partners who have said, "Listen. This ministry, this mission in particular burns deep in us so we're going to give \$320,000 to match every gift."

So if you can give \$64 they will match that and you will have rescued one child. Isn't that amazing? If you can give \$128 they will match that and you and your family will have rescued two of these precious little girls. A gift of \$1280 matched will rescue 20 children!

This is not something that we can turn away from. If you do something and I do something and we join together we can do it. So please go to your phone, call that number on your screen, make the best gift possible. Let's reach them 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]

In the studio

Randy: What you're seeing behind me right now are villagers who are learning how to not be lured into sex trafficking. We know for a fact that some girls have disappeared from this area and have not been heard of again. It's critical that we reach into areas like this and educate them so that they will know what to look for so when the sex traffickers come back through this area no more will be taken.

We're doing all that we can to reach into places like this, to rescue the girls that have been taken and to restore their lives and restore their families and restore their villages. I hope you'll go to

the phone right now, go online, do what you can. The Rescue Life program is making a huge impact in areas that really need the love of God. Do what you can. Thank you so much!

Sheila: Thank you so much! If you tried to call, if the line is busy, please write it down. Please call again. I'm going to go back soon to that same area and I want to let these, our people, our people on the ground know, hey, we're coming with a lot of help and I want to bring back stories to you of some of these girls that are now in a safe place. So please, make the best gift possible.

One of the amazing things about the love of God, when you get that as you are right now you are seen and you are loved, when you let that light flood your heart you want that to be true for every single person. I was able to pray with some of these young girls and lead them into a relationship with Christ. But there is so many more who are waiting now. So thank you for your help. I'll see you next time on *Wednesdays in the Word*.