

4/18/18

Week 16: Mission: Rescue Life

Wednesdays in the Word

Sheila Walsh: Who do we trust with our scars?

Sheila: Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. I'm Sheila Walsh.

I had the privilege recently of meeting a gentleman who had been through something that very few people go through and survive. He showed up as the only guy I think in this whole women's conference but he had come very specifically to tell me something. When he turned one side of his face toward me I saw that it was badly scarred; the way he spoke, his voice was very raspy and quiet. He told me that even though he was in his mid 40s now that when he was 15 years old he took a gun and put it underneath his chin and pulled the trigger. He said, "In that millisecond between the bullet leaving the gun and entering my skull I heard the Lord say, 'Do you want to live?' And I said yes." So he survived.

The bullet is still in his skull. I said, "Is it hard for you to see the scars and know that that is still there?"

He said, "No. It is a daily reminder of the grace of God." I saw that for him, his scars were really a tattoo of triumph.

It reminded me of somebody I met recently. I was sitting in the departure lounge waiting for my flight when that dreaded announcement, you know the one over the intercom, "The 3:30 p.m. flight to Dallas, Texas will now depart at 5:40. Thank you for your patience!" I looked at my fellow passengers and questioned the announcer's gratitude for our patience because it was the flight's third delay of the day and people were just not happy.

But I picked up my briefcase once again and returned to the coffee shop where I spent much of the day, ordered a cup of coffee and was settling in to read a newspaper when I became aware of somebody standing right in front of me. So I looked up and it was a woman about my age, tall, slim, short blond hair, I think. She smiled and she asked me, "Would you mind if I joined you for a moment?"

I said, "No! Of course not!"

She said, "I heard you speak at a conference and we have similar stories."

So I asked her when that was. She said, "It was last year in California and it led to this." And then she pulled up the sleeve of her sweater to reveal a small tattoo on her wrist. It was a semicolon.

I asked her, "What does that mean?"

She looked down at it and rubbed her finger over the black ink and she said, "It is about choosing to live for one more day. I'm part of a movement."

I asked her what the movement was. She told me it was called "Project Semicolon." She explained that it was a community of support for those who struggle with thoughts of self harm or suicide, also for those who battle any kind of mental illness or addiction. It's a community for those who want to share the truth and find support in one another. She had actually been at a conference hosted by Saddleback Church and she said that's when she heard me speak. She said, "You know, it kind of changed my life. I joined Project Semicolon after I heard you speak."

I remember that conference very well. Kay Warren had invited me to be a keynote speaker, the annual church and mental health symposium. And that, as you probably know is a conference that was born from the devastating pain of Kay and Rick's son, Matthew's suicide.

I usually don't get too nervous at things because I really get it, it is God that's going to show up but I was unusually nervous as I flew out to speak at that conference. I was speaking the first night and I wasn't quite sure of what I could add because the lineup of other speakers was impressive and very professional and honestly, a little intimidating. For example, a United States Surgeon General, Vice Admiral Vivek Murthy was there, a guy that has actually become a friend of mine now, Paul Summergrad who is the former head of the American Association of Psychiatrists, former congressman Patrick Kennedy, many, many more. I was the speaker on the opening night which I was actually grateful for because I didn't have to follow any of the other speakers.

I remember my opening line so well. Something that I certainly could not have said for most of my life. I said, "Good evening. My name is Sheila Walsh and I am profoundly grateful for the gift of mental illness. It means I can look into the eyes of somebody else who is suffering and say, 'Yeah, me too.'" There is something beautiful to me about being able to tell someone else who believes that they are the only one struggling that they're not alone.

So I looked at my friend in the airport coffee shop and asked her, "What does the semicolon

mean to you?"

She looked down at her wrist again and she said, "A semicolon is used when an author could have ended a sentence but chose not to. I'm the author and the sentence is my life."

She told me that when she raises her hands in worship now that little tattoo becomes an offering to God, a daily acknowledgment of her brokenness, of her faith in God. I love that! What the enemy intended for evil God was now using daily for good. I thanked her for telling me her story. It was really powerful. She said she had to go as her flight was boarding. I thought a lot about what she shared after that. I really needed to hear her words. I thought about that little tattoo on her wrist and I wondered, what was it about that little symbol that helped her when she was in the darker days? I think perhaps it reminds her to fight through those nights. It gives her something to focus on. It tells her to hold on.

See that's what my friend told me, the one who he'd taken a gun and put it under his chin. He said, "I'm going to start a new ministry. I'm going to start a ministry to teenagers. I'm going to tell them it's called "Hold On -- hold on for one more day."

For my friend in the airport it was a tangible declaration to her very weary soul that her story was not over yet even when her mind tells her, you know what? It really should be. Further, perhaps it lets her know she is not alone. It reminds her of the community around her who say, "Me too." See shame thrives in hiding and solitude, and whispers to us you're all alone. You'll never be enough. You will never change.

Freedom begins in a community of people who tell the truth; people committed to helping you carry your burden. Being part of Project Semicolon for her had given her that kind of community. They don't understand because they're experts, they understand because they're honest about their own suffering and they help her combat the lies. They help her see the truth about herself and they accept her just as she is.

Well, that kind of community, that's what we're called to be as the church and that kind of honest transparent living deprives shame of the very oxygen it needs to keep it alive. Lies breed in silence and honestly, silence is deadly. Although I know that speaking the truth can be very painful, sharing the secrets can bring healing.

Not all loss or pain or disappointment or struggle weighs the same. Some things are easier to carry than others. I think that's what Paul meant when he told those who loved Christ in Galatia, he said this, "Bear one another's burdens." But a few verses later though he says that each one should bear his own load.

When you first read that, the passage is a little confusing. Paul appears to contradict himself. How can we bear each other's burdens if we're all supposed to bear our own load? But that's when if you dig a little deeper you get to see what he meant. I discovered that the Greek word used in this passage for burdens is *baros* and that means a heavy load or a ship's load. But the word used later for load is *phortion*, which is used exclusively in the New Testament to refer to the load that Christ speaks of, a load that only he can help us bear. Remember when he said at the end of Matthew 11, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." So what he is saying is there are some situations that are too much and then we need to carry one another's and as other loads that we carry that Christ gives us the strength to carry.

I suppose I've stumbled into this truth over the years. There are some losses that feel like a ship's load, like more than we could possibly carry and that's when you and I, when we desperately need each other, when we're left to carry that kind of burden or *baros* alone. It changes us. It's just too much. We're not designed to walk through those times alone.

Speaking the truth about her life to those who understand her path has given my airport strength to keep walking. After she left, I sat and thought about Christ's encounter with Zacchaeus, a man who was completely despised by everyone who knew him. He was Jewish, yes, but he was also a tax collector for the Roman occupiers. The Romans gave this unsavory job to local recruits and allowed them to keep a percentage of whatever they collected. So Zacchaeus and his colleagues would take more than what was owed. So basically, they were parasites living off the vulnerability of their very own people.

So when Christ decided to share a meal with Zacchaeus, the people were horrified. How could Jesus spend time with a man who was literally bleeding them dry? Well, this was his response: "The Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."

I considered the verse and thought about the study I'd done on it years ago. The word use here is *apollumi* and it means to destroyed, ruined, broken beyond repair.

I thought about that girl for awhile, prayed for her, about her semicolon tattoo. I thought about Jesus who didn't come for those who are "Doing just fine; thank you." He came to save those who were and are willing to acknowledge that they're broken. Sometimes it seems and feels as if you're broken beyond repair. And even now in this tender way he comes to the doors of our hidden places and invites himself in for supper. Jesus wants to come to us in those very places, the secret shadows and then he wants to bid us to come out into the light. He wants to be in communion with us; wants to help carry the load of the pain and the shame. The stuff that keeps us honestly in isolation.

I don't think I'm the only one over life who has constructed walls around parts of myself. We all

know that pain is part of life but when too much of it happens all at once or when it happens too early in life, or when we feel helpless to stop it, the pain can make us believe that we don't want to go on. It's why we build this secret place inside ourselves where that pain can just hang out. It follows us there and we believe it can't hurt me there because I've got it all walled up. We falsely think that the world can't see it either and we can pretend for a long time that everything is okay. And I think sometimes maybe as children there's a sort of saving grace.

When I think of the stories that women have shared with me throughout the years, the stories of the worst kind of abuse and betrayal, I wonder how some of you have made it. Perhaps some have survived by burying the pain deep inside. But I believe now that others have discovered the beauty of living open yet broken with Christ.

My new friend with the tattoo doesn't pretend that her pain is gone but brings it into the light of a crucified savior. He helps her carry it with hands scarred by love. Christ's resounding "yes" to the father's plan to save us took him down a brutal, brutal bloody path but it gave life to each one of us who will say "yes" to Christ and no to the lies that would keep us hidden.

In James 5:16 we read this: *Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.*

Sometimes when you look at that verse you think, well, it's not really sin. I'm just struggling with guilt over something that happened in my past or pain of something that was done to me; that's not sin so I'm not going to confess that. But I think that passage means so much more. I think what it means is whatever you are hiding from Christ, when you can confess that one to another and pray for each other. I know how hard that can be and you have to honestly do it with wisdom. I know you know that. You don't just want to pour out some of the most painful parts of your life just to anybody.

I love the way that Jesus puts that when he said, "Don't cast your pearls before swine." He's not calling your friends pigs. What he is saying is, don't take what is precious to you and give it to someone who is going to trample it underfoot not realizing the value. There is such strength in finding one or two people that you can consider your "safe people."

I think sometimes, guys, it is harder for you than it is for us girls. I think it is hard for a man to confess that he is struggling. My own husband Barry, he found a group in a -- it's not actually in our church, it is in another local church but for those who had gone through any kind of abuse in their childhood. I remember him saying when he came home the first night. He said, "I don't know why I was there because I don't relate to any of these people." They seemed different from him and their experiences were different.

I said, "Well, you don't have to go but why don't you go just another couple times and see what it's like?"

And I'll never forget after maybe the third or fourth time being part of that group he came home and I could tell that my husband had been crying which is something that I don't often see. I said, "What happened tonight?"

He said, "As I sat and listened to every one of their stories, I realized they are me. One was a doctor who looks so completely put together. Somebody else has lost a job because of an addiction to alcohol. But I listened to all their stories and it suddenly became crystal clear that we are all the same."

But we live in a culture that encourages us to cover up our pain. Have you ever noticed that the pictures that you see on Instagram, particularly Instagram but Facebook too, and you wonder, how many times has that person sat with that image and put filter after filter over it so that here's the very best moment in my life and this is what I always look like when I wake up in the morning. That's not life. You can feel connected but that's not connection. I would honestly rather have ten real friends, even five real friends than 50,000 followers because most of them we don't even really know.

In these days, as the days get darker, I think it is even more important for us to be faithful in our friendships, faithful in our reading of God's word, and also faithful in being part of the local body of Christ. I had the privilege recently of being out in California taping a series on End Time Prophecy with Dr. David Jeremiah. He reminded me that in the book of Revelation it says, "Blessed are those in the last days who continue to meet together."

I know one or two of you have written to me and said, "I don't really like going to church. It is full of hypocrites. I've been hurt by the church. I just watch online."

The trouble is when we watch life online, we're not really known. So I would really encourage you. Whatever scars you have, whether they're like my friend whose scar is on his face or like the girl I met whose little tattoo reminds her of a choice she makes every single day, wherever your scars are, they can actually be tattoos of triumph when we offer them to Christ.

We all have brokenness. Some of us hide it really well but when we can, like my friend does when she worships God and holds up the very arms that she wants to slit these wrists but now there is a mark that says, "No, I'm choosing in Jesus' name to be strong."

I really encourage you friend, find somebody you can tell the truth to. Find a church where you

can belong and fit in and then you'll discover we have a bigger role. There are some people right now with very deep scars and they need us to get involved right now and make sure the scars don't get any deeper. Would you watch this with me?

On the mission field

Sheila: I just wanted to explain why with this particular little girl, that we're not showing her face. She's 11 years old so we want to do everything we can to protect her. So when you were just nine years old, something terrible happened to you one night. Why don't you tell us about that?

Open Captions:

>> My dad is in prison and my mom ran away with some man. So I collected cans for food money to feed me and my brothers and my sister. Then one night... A guy on a motor vehicle grabbed me and took me to a bar. I was locked in a room and many different men would come in. If I refused to be with the men, I was beaten. After a year, they let me out of the room and I ran away. Right now I'm free but I still have to go out at night to pick up cans. I still have to buy all the food for my family. I'm scared that I will be taken again and made to go back into that room.

Sheila: I'm horrified by her story and the tragedy is she is not the only one. There are so many girls. And here's what I think. If we don't defend her, if we don't say no to those vicious predators -- and trust me, they are very well organized and they're very well funded so we've got to get organized, we've got to get funded. It is time to let our righteous anger rise to the surface. There is some things that we can say that is not good but this is evil. This is absolute evil from the pit of hell! And we cannot abandon these beautiful children who are longing to know that there is at least one person on this planet who cares for them. I want her to know it's you and it's me and we're going to fight for them in Jesus' name.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: She was such a precious little lamb.

One of the things I learned when I was over there is in certain countries in Southeast Asia, the minute you're born you're a year old. So when she told us, "I was taken when I was nine" she was actually eight. And if you're tempted to think, why is she out in the streets at night gathering cans? Think of her story. Her dad is in prison and her mom ran off with a younger man so now she is the head of the family and she has four other brothers and sisters including a baby that her

mother had and then left. She doesn't -- she's never been to school so she doesn't have an education. She can't read or write so she can't get a regular job so the only thing she can do is be out at night gathering cans. For eight cans she can get a quarter. But the only time those cans are thrown out are between like 10-11 at night and 2-3 in the morning when all the bars throw the cans out; and that's how she was kidnapped the very first time.

Honestly, to see the fear in her eyes knowing that I'm free at the moment but at any moment I could be taken again -- but what choice does she have? She is the only one that can feed her younger brothers and sisters.

And this is the last week of Rescue Life. This changed me. I've been to certain countries before and I've seen what's happening but this last trip changed me because these are little ones who are crying out for somebody to care. If we, as the body of Christ don't reach out and do something, then who is going to do it? The government is not going to do it. It's our joy and our responsibility.

Now we have amazing people who want to help us. Normally, it would take \$128 to rescue one child and some of you are thinking, I would love to do that but that's too much for me. But do you know that these friends of *LIFE* have said, "We will bring matching gifts." So if you can give just \$64 they will match that and that will rescue a child. If you can give \$128, instead of just rescuing one child, you've now as they match it, rescued two.

Oh gosh! I'm going back there and I want to know that we've done something, that we haven't gone and seen and left them. These children, they are beautiful! They're not hardened. They're precious little girls. And I prayed with them. I told them that Christ is watching over them. But what right do I have to tell them that if I'm not going to get involved in rescuing them?

Our mission here is reach the kids before they ever get trafficked, rescue them where they are and then restore them.

This is our last week so please, if you haven't given up until now and even if you have, would you give again? Barry and I are going to do that. We want, if you can give \$1280 that will normally rescue ten children. Do you know that that will be matched now to rescue 20 children? So please go to your phone, go online, give the very best gift and rescue these children in the powerful name of Jesus.

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. This is the last week! Please call, write, or make your secure gift online.

End of clip

In the studio

Randy: A human trafficker came through here many months ago and promised this young lady's sister a better life, lured her away and they haven't heard from her. She's, as far as they know, gone. They have her picture and they have a prayer that she'll come back, a hope that they will see her again.

This is the reality here and in places all over the world. That's why Rescue LIFE is critical. We must first reach into places like this with education, so that they'll know what to look out for when these predators come through. We must rescue the girls that we can and get them out of the sex trade. And we must restore them; we must give them a hope and a future. We can do that.

We can do it on a larger scale but we have to have your help. I pray that you will help us as we try to help so many girls. We have to stop this abuse. It's not right. You can do something. Join with us as we rescue life.

Sheila: Thank you so much! Thank you for helping us. If you couldn't get through please keep

trying. I promised these little ones that I would come home and I would tell their stories. And not only tell their stories, but make a difference in their lives. So thank you.

This is as I said our very last week so please would you make the very best gift possible? I will look forward to seeing you again next Wednesday on *Wednesdays in the Word*. I'm Sheila Walsh.