

5/30/18
Week 22: Spring Mission Feeding
Wednesdays in the Word
Sheila Walsh: Wrestling with God

Sheila: Welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. I'm Sheila Walsh. Thanks so much for joining us here.

I got a letter the other day from a gentleman who said, "I don't understand. I've been praying, I've known the Lord for years and it seems like the things that I used to do don't seem to have the same impact. I still read the word, I still go to worship on Sunday, I go to my midweek men's Bible study and I feel as if God is distant; and all the stuff that used to bring me closer to God doesn't seem to be having the same impact."

So it made me think about it a lot and I thought, you know there are times in our life when God wants more. He wants to know that we are willing to wrestle, to find a faith that is deeper. So that's what we're going to look at today.

When my mother-in-law Eleanor died my father-in-law William moved in with us. He was such a sweet man. I really wanted to find things that we could all do together as a family. He loved to travel so he came with us every single weekend to all my speaking engagements. Sometimes he would even autograph my books and he would write, "Love you past heaven."

I would say to him, "Exactly where is that?" But he never had quite a convincing answer.

Well, I told him one night that whatever his favorite TV show was I'd watch it with him. Not smart! I should have been more particular because apparently it's wrestling. I watched with him but I have no clue what they're doing or why they're doing it.

Now when I became an American citizen, William was there for the ceremony as was my mom and he gave me a gift. He was so excited about it. He said, "You are going to love this!"

I was very excited so I opened the package and it was a T-shirt. Well, not just any old T-shirt, it was this: A Hulk Hogan T-shirt. So as you can imagine I treasure it to this day. [Laughing]

There is a story in the Old Testament of a very unusual wrestling match. It is between God and a

man and God started the fight. So let's read, Genesis Chapter 32, reading from verses 22 to 30:

During the night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two servant wives, and his 11 sons and crossed the Jabbok River with them. After taking them to the other side, he sent over all his possessions. This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. When the man saw that he would not win the match he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket.

Then the man said, "Let me go for the dawn is breaking."

But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

"What is your name?" The man asked.

He replied, "Jacob."

"Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

"Please tell me your name," Jacob said.

"Why do you want to know my name?" The man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared."

It's a fascinating passage and we need a little background to fully appreciate the significance of what happened that night. Jacob, you probably remember is Isaac's son, Abram's grandson. Now Isaac married Rebekah when he was 40 years old and for 20 years she tried to get pregnant but she couldn't. In those days that was seen as a curse from God if a woman couldn't conceive. So after watching her distress for so many years, Isaac pleaded with God for his wife and she became pregnant with twins. She had a very hard time with the pregnancy. Scripture tells us that the boys wrestled with each other in the womb.

My very last concert was just a few days before my son Christian was born. Talk about a show and tell -- all I needed was a donkey.

When Rebecca gave birth the first boy came out and his name was Esau and then Jacob came out right behind him, literally clinging to his brother's heel. They were not identical but fraternal twins and they had very, very different personalities. Esau was more of a man's man. He was a

hunter. Jacob was a quieter, more introspective boy who liked to stay home and was very close to his mother Rebekah. He also was a bit of a schemer as his name suggests, since his name means "deceiver."

One day Esau made a choice that impacted his life and the future of his whole family. His choice showed that he didn't place any value on who he was and what had been promised to him as the firstborn son.

You can read it in Genesis Chapter 25: One day when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau arrived home from the wilderness exhausted and hungry. Esau said to Jacob, "I'm starved! Give me some of that red stew!"

"All right," Jacob replied, "but trade me your rights as the firstborn son."

"Look, I'm dying of starvation," said Esau. "What good is my birthright to me now?"

Jacob said, "No. First you must swear that your birthright is mine."

So Esau swore an oath thereby selling all his rights as the firstborn to his brother Jacob.

I think it's hard for us to grasp how hugely significant this was. Birthright is not a huge thing for us. When our parents die some have the ability to leave some money or property in their will. I remember when Barry's mom died she left me this doll collection, like 200 dolls and some of them are really old. Some of them are terrifying. One of them looked like Chucky. William left us what he described as "collectibles." Yeah. We had to ditch most of those.

But we have to look back little further to understand how huge this thing that Esau did was. God had made a promise to Abraham before he and Sarah had any children, you can read it in Genesis 15. It says: The Lord took Abram outside and said to him, "Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have."

And Abram believed the Lord and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.

You may remember that Sarah got tired of waiting to have a son so she told Abram to sleep with her maid Hagar who gave birth to a boy and they named him Ishmael. So now there is one son.

Well, let's fast forward a few years. Ishmael is now a teenager and Abram was now 100 years old when God told him that his wife Sarah would become pregnant. Read this: "How could I become a father at the age of 100? He thought. "And how can Sarah have a baby when she was 90 years old?" So Abraham said to God, "May Ishmael live under your special blessing!"

But God are he applied, "No -- Sarah your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant."

This wasn't being left like the house and the car, this was God's eternal covenant to Isaac and to his firstborn son and on and on through the generations. So why would Esau sell that for a bowl of food? Why would he be so careless? He gave up what was eternal for what he wanted now. He gave up what he'd been promised for what he was hungry for in a moment.

Don't you think that is a common temptation? Perhaps God promised you a godly husband or wife and after years you just got tired of waiting. Perhaps it was a promise of a future ministry but you can't see it happening so you settle for less or you just make alternate plans. Sometimes we can give up our destiny for what we desire in that moment.

Once Esau understood fully what he had done and that his father had placed his hands on Jacob and given him the blessing, he knew it couldn't be taken back. So now he wanted to kill Jacob so Jacob ran for his life. So when we encounter Jacob going into that wrestling match, it's been 20 years since he left home and he wants -- he wants to go back home. But not only that, God had promised to bring him back. You might remember the story in Genesis 28 where Jacob, while asleep, saw a stairway from heaven to earth. Yeah! The original stairway to heaven.

"One day I will bring you back this this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you. Genesis 28:15B.

Although Jacob had this promise, he's terrified so as he sets out, he sends gifts ahead. Basically, he is the same old Jacob. He thinks he can buy forgiveness. So he takes all his family, all his possessions and he gets them all over the river to get ready for the long journey. But he crosses back to spend the night alone in the camp. I'm sure he was desperate. I imagine him on his knees. He has no idea that the fight that's ahead will not be with his brother Esau, it will be with God and with his own soul.

So often the greatest wrestling matches in life are not with anyone else, they're with ourselves.

Remember, we read: This left Jacob all alone in the camp and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. When the man saw that he would not win the match he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched out the socket. Then the man said, "Let me go for the dawn is breaking."

Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

Jacob realizes at some point in the wrestling match he is actually wrestling with God. It's what's called a theophany in scripture. It was an appearance of Christ. God had spoken to Jacob in dreams or visions before but this was something new and it required him to wrestle with God all night long.

Have you ever found yourself in a place for all the ways that God used to speak to you aren't working anymore? And you feel as if you're in the fight of your life. Sometimes when God is doing something new in us, it doesn't feel good at all. We're longing for God's comfort but what he sends comes in an unexpected and even unwanted package. But I know -- I know in my own life it changes who we are.

It's interesting that God started the fight that night. He was the instigator. Jacob was consumed with fear, overwhelmed, everything seemed as if it could fall apart. Maybe you're in a place where you long for God to help you and it just seems like he turns up the heat. He'll do that because he loves us so much.

As dawn was about to break, Christ asked to be released. They had been fighting in the dark. Most likely he didn't want Esau to see his face and at that point, the fight changes. God started it but now Jacob refuses to let him go until God blesses him. He had to be in a lot of pain but he won't let go of God. He no longer has any confidence in his own ability to talk his way out of anything. He gets it -- deep in his gut, God is his only hope.

Most evangelical commentators write that Christ wrenched the hip out of place, it was a violent act. But many messianic Jewish rabbis see it differently. They see Christ and Jacob face to face and Christ wraps his arm around Jacob and dislocates his hip. It seems that there are times when God only releases his blessings on us after a season of prolonged, even painful wrestling.

Jacob began that night believing his greatest need was to escape from Esau. He ended that night understanding his greatest need was to trust in God's promises and hold on to God no matter what. Well, God gives him a new name. "Your name will no longer be Jacob but Israel because you have struggled God and with man and have overcome."

Jacob: Deceiver. Israel: One who strives with God or Prince with God.

I think it is actually a profound gift to be brought to the place where you are desperate enough to insist on what you need the most from God. I was reading a piece on a messianic Jewish community's website, it is called Sar Shalom, Prince of Peace Community. This is what it said about the importance of overcoming. Scripture is full of promises made to those who overcome. "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I

will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God."

Then a couple verses later: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna."

Listen to this! "I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."

We can't simply equate overcoming with saying, "Well, I believe in Jesus so I'm an overcomer." Because if you think about it, the first three chapters of the book of Revelation were written to the seven churches. These words were written to those who had already said, "I believe in Jesus." Overcoming is when we refuse to let go of God and we wrestle as long as it takes. Whatever temptation seems more appealing than holding on to all God has for us requires an intentional wrestling match, often with our own flesh.

So how did Jacob overcome? What man did he wrestle with? We've identified one of those already, the Messiah. But who is the other? It would be easy to just think of Jacob wrestling with his brother Esau or his uncle Laban but neither of those fights resulted in overcoming. Honestly, they were mostly about cheating. Those fights were fought by Jacob the deceiver.

I believe the man Jacob wrestled with and overcame that night was himself -- that's why God changed his name. We've all wrestled with God in that way. Me, I've wrestled God and said, "Please, would you take my depression away? I'll give you all the glory."

Paul, remember, "Remove this thorn in my flesh?"

If necessary, God will cause us to walk with a limp to increase our faith. When Christ leaves Jacob as morning broke Jacob sees Esau coming toward him with 400 men. It did not look like a welcome home party. It looks like potentially his whole family could be wiped out. So Jacob divides his family in two. Sends one in one direction and the other in another. He limps toward his brother with a weakened body but a strengthened faith.

When God calls you and I to wrestle with him, there is always more going on than we understand at the time. God always uses it to transform us for good. What's your battle? What are you wrestling? What are you desperate enough to hold on to Jesus until he blesses you? I honestly think we are in a season where God is saying, "Come on. If you're my son, if you're my daughter, will you fight for your faith?"

And even though it might leave you -- the fight might leave you feeling as if humanly you have less strength remember that God delights to use us when we feel weakened so that His grace is

sufficient and it is clear to everybody around, wow! This is the Lord.

I know in my own life that every time that God does a deeper work in me, I have a fresh understanding of why we're on this earth. We're on this earth to make a difference not just in our families but for people all around the world. And there are some very special people, special to us here at *LIFE*, and I'll tell you about it a little bit more later but I want you, please, would you watch this with me?

On the mission field

Announcer: There is a poem written about a home where children died. One of the lines says: "It must be hard to live that way." That statement sums up the feelings of mothers in these villages who no longer hear the voice or see the smile of a child who died simply because there was not enough food. Once a child shows signs of malnutrition mothers will try and make their way to a rural clinic in a desperate attempt to save their life.

Isak: Today is particularly heartbreaking for me because this clinic is over full. They actually had to put extra beds down because they don't have enough space. What that means, I don't know if you understand what it means. What it means is that tens of children will die in the next week in this one clinic.

But what else that means is that the devastation of drought, the result of a lack of food means that there are hundreds and thousands of children in villages in this area that are in desperate need that are in critical condition that will end up in these clinics -- dying in a village somewhere unseen, unknown to you and I.

Please! We can solve this problem so easily. If we get Mission Feeding to those villagers in time we can save those children's lives. We can save them from coming here. We can save them from death's door. Please! Open your hearts. Do whatever you can do. Give whatever gift you can give because the gift you give today is truly the gift of life.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: I've been in that very same malnutrition clinic and nothing -- nothing prepares you for the sights and the sounds. Sitting beside several of the mothers, it could be me -- it could be you! These are just moms who care for their children.

Someone asked me recently, "Why don't they just get their children to the clinic earlier?"

It's hard to describe what it is like there. So many of these moms have walked mile after mile after mile. They don't have transport. They don't have a car. They're in remote villages. So often when they started out toward the clinic, that little one was doing better but by the time they made the way all the way there sometimes that little one has little more than hours to live. The look on the faces of these moms is absolutely heartbreaking. These are not moms who don't care. These are moms I have watched literally scrape the ground looking for something that they could give to their children to eat.

It's just -- it's inconceivable to me what it must be like as a mom to watch your children lay down at night and cry simply because they are hungry. I went from the malnutrition clinic to villages where we have set up Mission Feeding and I had the joy of sitting there and handing out bowl after bowl of food and it's the most amazing -- it looks a little like oatmeal but it is a special food made for children in that area full of vitamins and minerals and protein. It is as if from that first bowl of food they go from death to life. It's like the corner is turned and suddenly the dawn is breaking.

So I want us to do that. I want us to feed 400,000 children this year. We can do it! It is not hard. Do you know that just for \$30 you can feed three children for three whole months? \$50 will feed five children for three months. And \$100 will feed ten children for three months!? Some of you are able to give a bigger gift and if you can, please do. \$1,000 will feed 100 children!

Maybe look around your Sunday school class and think, I could feed this amount of children with this money and I honestly wouldn't miss it. Maybe you're on a more fixed budget but you think, I could do \$30. Or maybe my sister and I could go in together. Maybe you're a teenager and you think, me and my buddies could do it. Whatever it is, let's all do something and we can change this.

Please go to your phone. Would you make the very best gift possible? You can give online. If you dial the number first and the line is busy and I hope it is, write it down, call back, be determined in Jesus' name that we're not going to say no to these moms.

I have walked beside those graves as they're digging fresh graves. And on one of our trips we had to respectfully step back because the family had just arrived with another baby. Let's determine not on our watch. Thank you!

Begin video clip

Announcer: In impoverished and drought-stricken areas of Africa children are suffering. The need is great and without food they face severe malnutrition -- even death.

With your support LIFE's Mission Feeding outreach can save lives by feeding and caring for children in the hardest hit areas of Angola, Mozambique, and South Sudan. With previous reserves gone and Mission Feeding helping in areas with severe crop failure we urgently need to replenish our food supplies to reach 400,000 children who are counting on us.

Your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 will help feed and care for three, five or ten children for three full months. And with your gift of any amount, we'll send you *Proverbs Power: Successful Communication*. This powerful CD series, along with study guide featuring Steven K. Scott unveils the secrets to incredible wisdom found only in the book of Proverbs. This series will give you the tools to transform your relationships in life.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the complete *Proverbs Power* library featuring five power-packed sessions that include: The Power of Vision, Breaking through Mediocrity, and much more.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request the "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

Sheila: I'm here in just one of the malnutrition clinics. And as you can see I'm here with this beautiful mother and this little one. It's Africa, it is warm here but look at her legs; she is completely wrapped up and her little hands. The need is so urgent. I've heard about it. I've seen the things that James and Betty have done for years, but to actually come here myself and see with my own eyes how urgent the need is, I'm asking you, in Jesus' name.

Would you go to the phones right now or would you go on LifeToday.org and make the best gift possible? We can all do something. It doesn't matter if you're a 14-year old kid watching this or if you're 84 years old and you're living on a limited income, we can all do something. No mother should have to travel 25 kilometers to bring her very sick child to a clinic because she's so malnourished.

Would you give your best gift now? Please go to your phone right now, go online right now and give the best you can. If we all do it, we can change the world for these moms and for these children.

Sheila: Thank you so much! For responding and reaching out in love we want to send you some gifts. For any gift at all we're going to send you this, it is called *Proverbs Power*. And for a larger gift we're going to send you all -- these are teachings by, I don't know if you know Steve Scott, he is amazing! Every time I'm with him I learn so much. His love for Christ is powerful.

I know you don't give for the gifts but we want to bless you as you bless others. I just want to know that the next time that we go back to Africa, which won't be very long now, that we can see so many villages where the mothers used to be desperate but now we can say no, because of Jesus, your children are going to live.

Thank you so much for being with me. See you next time on *Wednesdays in the Word*.