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Week 35: Christmas Shoes & Smiles

Wednesdays in the Word

Sheila Walsh: The Brokenness Becomes a Bridge

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

Recently I was in Australia and I shared some of my story with some of the girls there at Hillsong Church's sisterhood. A young girl came up to me at the end and she said, "It just kind of blows me away that you would share your story." She said, "I have a story but I don't want to share it with anyone because I think people are going to think less of me and it is going to alienate me from people."

What I told her -- and obviously, you have to be careful, you don't just tell all your stuff to anyone. We're supposed to use wisdom. In fact, the way Jesus said it was, "Don't cast your pearls before swine." Really, just meaning, don't take what is precious to you and give it to people who are going to trample it. But when you have some good safe people in your life, I've discovered that your brokenness can actually become a bridge to other people to help them.

So that's what I want us to look at today. What does it look like to share our stories with others? And I believe when Christ has set us free then truly our brokenness can become a bridge to others. There's a lot of scriptural precedent for that.

Psalm 22 says this: I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among the assembled people.

Maybe you think well, that's more just talking about God's goodness. But do you

remember Christ's encounter with a man we call the Gadarene demoniac? After that man had been delivered from demonic possession we read this: Jesus sent him home saying, "Now go back to your family and tell them everything that God has done for you." So he went all through the town proclaiming the great things that Jesus had done for him.

When I left co-hosting the 700 Club in 1992, I went back to seminary in California. I'd spent so many years of my life trying to be good enough for God and when my life finally fell apart I began to understand that God had always loved me, I kind of wanted to go back to seminary and shift the focus from what do I have to do to be good enough to really digging deep into what Christ has already done for us.

Well, one morning I'm about to leave my apartment and the phone rang. I almost let the machine take it but all my family lives in Scotland and England so I never want to miss a chance to hear their voices. So I answered the phone and it was my best friend Marlene.

She said to me, Sheila, would you do me a favor if you're free on Saturday?

I said, "Sure! Just name it. What do you need?"

She said, "I would love it if you would speak at a woman's luncheon at a private country club in Palm Springs."

I laughed. I said to her, "Honestly, Marlene, I would rather stick my hand in a blender than do that."

She was very persistent. She said, "Honestly, Sheila, I need you to do this."

I told her, "Marlene I would love to help you" but up until that point in my life I had never spoken in public. The thought would have terrified me. My background was TV with the B.B.C. in London and on the 700 Club or music, being on the stage. But the thought of getting on a platform with a mike and speaking, it terrified me.

So I told her, "Just ask somebody else." I said, "Marlene, you know lots of women who that's their gift. They're very gifted speakers."

Here's what she said to me. She said, "Okay, here's the bottom line. I've already asked everyone else. You are the bottom of the barrel."

Yeah! That was my best friend telling me that. So I said, "Okay. Because I love you, I will go but please tell them this was the best you could get."

Well, Saturday morning rolled around and I was so mad at myself for agreeing to speak. Have you ever done that? Like someone asks you to do something and you're in a good mood because you've just eaten a pint of Ben and Jerry's ice cream and you haven't really thought about what it's going to look like. And then suddenly, it's upon you and you start praying for the eminent return of Christ.

I looked at my sparse wardrobe and sighed. I'd left my five years' worth of on-air clothing behind me in Virginia Beach for the next co-host because we were the same size. I didn't have anything suitable for a country club lunch in Palm Springs. I had one decent church outfit so I pulled it out, got dressed, and dragged my sorry self to my car.

It was about an hour and a half's drive from my apartment where I was living in Laguna Beach to Palm Springs. I complained to the Lord the whole trip. I don't have anything to say. I don't have anything in common with these women. Why didn't you stop me? You're not going to look good today. I was like, Lord, this is going to be an absolute disaster.

I remember pulling my little car into the palm tree lined driveway and it was worse than I thought. I saw exquisitely dressed women relinquishing their car keys to young valets in red blazers. I saw women stepping out of chauffeured driven limos in little Chanel suits and perfect makeup. Oh good grief! I have no idea what I'm doing here.

Well, I was received in the lobby by a very kind welcoming committee. I was sorely tempted to introduce myself as hello! My name is Sheila. You can just call me the bottom of the barrel but I didn't. After a delicious looking lunch which I did not touch, I was so nervous, the chair lady introduced me. She was clearly not aware of the bottom of the barrel thing. She talked about my years in broadcasting at the B.B.C. in London, my books, my music, my years of co-hosting. I could feel the expectation level in the room rise in direct proportion to how low I was sinking down in my chair.

So I walked slowly to the platform with my heart literally thudding in my chest. Climbed the five steps that took me to the podium and I closed my eyes for just a moment; just with this simple prayer, kind of a desperate prayer, Lord, Father, what do I do? And I felt as if the spirit said to me, "Sheila, just tell the truth."

So I did. I told that room full of beautiful ladies that just a few months before that I'd been in a locked ward of a psychiatric hospital. I told them that for years I tried to hide behind perfect makeup and hair. I told them that I'd found that public Christian ministry can actually be the perfect place to hide because no one asks questions. No one questions your motives or wonders if your drive to do more and more comes from a call or a wound, from genuine passion or absolute panic.

I told them that I believed that when we are unwilling or unable to deal with the pain of life we find a place to hide. It can be at the bottom of a bottle, it can be in a stranger's bed, it can be in a perfect home or perfect face, but we're not free. I told them that I came to the place where the pain of staying the same was greater than the pain of change -- whatever that was going to look like. I told them that Jesus Christ had rescued me and that my life now was following him one step at a time.

For most of it, I didn't even dare to look in their faces because I just knew they would be like, who invited this loser? But suddenly I became aware of how quiet the room had become. No one was like clinking their coffee cup spoon or rumbling through a purse or

looking for their cell phone. I finally had the courage to look at the crowd and began to really look at their faces. I remember one woman in the front row had tears pouring down her cheeks. And further back, there was a woman who literally had her face in her hands. I had no idea what to do. I didn't really understand what was going on. It was the first time I had ever spoken publically and it was the first time I had ever told my story. As far as I understood, my story was a reason for people to politely and kindly move back. Mostly, I thought that what I'd gone through was just my story and no one else would be able to relate to it.

When I finished, I wasn't sure what I was supposed to do. I mean this will sound totally bizarre but this is exactly what happened. See, I'm used to television where at the end you say good-bye and they roll the credits. Or I'm used to the end of a concert with a band where you say, "Good night, Cleveland! Rock and roll!" I thought, I don't know how to get off. I don't know how to finish this and get off the platform.

So I remember standing there and literally saying, "Okay, well, that's about it. I'm not in a big hurry to go anywhere. I'll just hang around in case anybody wants to talk. The end." Well, one by one women came up and began to tell me their stories. I was stunned by the transparency that took place. Through tears women talked about addiction to alcohol and pills, affairs, depression, anxiety -- one after another. It was as if for a moment there was an understanding in the room that it was actually all right to be human after all; to be broken and to talk about it.

I remember being shocked, not by what the women were saying but because I always thought that people wanted me to be perfect. So I could help them. If I reached out for help myself I'd always thought that then I would lose my perceived usefulness to others. But suddenly I began to see just that my brokenness was a far greater bridge to others than my pretend wholeness had ever been.

I think back on that day now, I can hardly believe that I once thought and lived as I did. It was almost a kind of -- almost like a perverted arrogance in the mentality of "perfection."

I did not mean to be arrogant. I didn't understand that I had adopted a platform which only Christ can stand on. But the truth is all I have to offer to anyone else is a life surrendered to Christ so that his beauty, His grace can shine through my brokenness. Now honestly, back then, those words would have sounded like lovely lyrics to a worship song. But now I get the truth of them and the freedom that comes from understanding I'm not the good news, Jesus is.

I cried all the way home that day. I found myself saying to the Lord, you knew this was going to happen; didn't you? It was just -- it was overwhelming to me. Taking these few hours, I tucked them into my heart and I remember getting home and I remember getting down on my knees and saying, "Okay, Lord, I get it. For the rest of my life I'm going to dedicate my life to telling the good news of your word but also the brokenness of my own journey."

I love the way that Paul, what he wrote to the church in Thessalonica. It's very clear he was really fond of those people; you can just tell it in the letter, he really loved them. But he said something that has become almost like my kind of line or my understanding, my mission statement. He said, "We determined among you not just to share the good news but our very lives."

In Second Corinthians we read this: All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father -- not angry Father, not demanding Father, not disappointed Father, he is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort that God has given us.

Now I don't know what your story is. Maybe you think mine is too hard to share. And that's why I would really encourage you first of all to share it completely with the Lord. That might sound silly. You might think, well, Sheila, obviously God knows. I know that. But I want you to know that God knows. There's something powerful about finding a quiet place away from others and simply telling God the whole truth. And the amazing

thing about the love of God is this. You don't have to edit yourself; you don't have to come up with a kind of version that makes it seem a little bit better. You don't have to be God's P.R. agent either. God can handle the truth.

And there is something I found in my own life, just something very powerful about being in the Lord's presence and telling him everything out loud, giving him the thing that you thought would be the thing that maybe disqualified you from ministry. Because think about it. Who are the people who have encouraged you the most in your faith? In my life, it is the people who are the most transparent. There are certain people that you might look up to and think, whoa, they're amazing. I'll never be like that. But then there are people who lean in close and share their stories and you suddenly think, I'm not the only one.

I think of people like Kay Warren, Rick Warren. They are that way for me. They went through the unthinkable suicide of their son, their darling son Matthew. And even as they were crushed by the weight of that, in time, out of that crushing came a fragrance of Christ. Because now they are so active in reaching out to the church and to all sorts of groups in our culture talking about mental illness, removing the stigma, letting people know it is okay not to be okay.

I would encourage you to maybe even write your story down and then ask the Lord, is there anyone that I could share this with? You might see somebody who is in your church or your little group or your Bible study and you know they're hurting. So often we just think, well, you're hurting so I have 14 verses for you. And while that is wonderful, it is so encouraging to hear the Word of God, sometimes when the pain is the freshest, I think the words should be the fewest. But simply being able to sit down with someone else who is hurting and say, "Hey, do you mind if I share a little of my own journey?" You have no idea the difference that that will make in the life of someone else. Because if they're like me way back, they will think they're the only one. So often we think, there's nobody else like me. There's nobody else who struggles with this particular thing.

But when your trust is in the complete love and mercy of God, when you get it at the depth of your soul, that God knows your whole story and loves you, it gives you the space and grace to reach out to others too.

And one of the things that we're going to get to do in a few minutes is reach out to those who have some very practical needs. Some of them are deeper than others but you and I, we can make a difference. Watch this.

On the mission field

>> Yes, I'm so excited for you. So happy for you.

Announcer: *LIFE Outreach* and our friends have another reason to celebrate this holiday season providing some 150,000 children from around the world with a Christmas gift they have never possessed or enjoyed -- a brand-new pair of shoes! The joy that this gift of a simple pair of shoes brings to these children can be measured by the excitement and the smiles on their faces.

Ralph: Look at them running right through all that with their shoes. Look at them! Look at that! That's what it is all about right there.

Sheila: It is such a joy to give out these shoes to these children. You might think that's just a fun thing but sometimes it literally saves a life. When these children walk around with bare feet and they get their feet cut with stones or all sorts of diseases can enter their just darling, beautiful, little body. So this really is a gift of life as much as anything else. So let's try these, buddy. Let's see how they go. Yay!

Announcer: This year also marks a milestone as literally hundreds of children who previously could not smile because of cleft palate problems now have a new outlook on

life thanks to corrective surgery that afforded them the ability to smile.

Ralph: Today I'm sitting here with little Momo. Little Momo is a little boy that was brought here, just recently that had one of the worst cleft palate, cleft lip needs we've ever seen before. The doctors were able to operate on him and bring him what we would call a Christmas smile. And today we thank God that all of our donors, each one of you who give so generously to bring smiles on little children like Momo.

Announcer: What a wonderful gift of a corrective surgery that love provided! A gift that will last a lifetime.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: I think this is one of my favorite campaigns that we do throughout the year. It is a joy, it's easy to do, but in so many circumstances we also see it's not just a pair of shoes, sometimes it is literally the difference between life and death. So many of these children, because they've never worn shoes in their life and they're not walking on nice sidewalks, they're walking on rough ground where their feet get cut. When they get cuts in their feet or they're in this dirty water and they end up with hook worm that can go to the brain and do damage there, so many of these children, their very lives are threatened simply for the lack of a pair of shoes.

I don't even think twice, when my son needs new shoes because his feet keep growing, I don't think anything about it, we get him a new pair of shoes. But for some moms, they're not able to do that. They've never had shoes. But we have come up with this amazing solution. These darling little shoes, do you know we're able to send one pair for \$3.60. What can you get for \$3.60? You can't even get one of those fancy coffee drinks. But this could bring life to a child. If you could spare \$36, we can send ten pairs. We call

them Christmas Shoes & Smiles and you're like, "It is a wee bit early for Christmas" but that's very intentional because we want to get these shoes to these children in time. We need to know how many we can order and then get them overseas.

Can you imagine the joy on the faces of these children and their moms? Some days we will see children that are almost too far gone, the damage is there. That's why I think I feel so urgent about this. Even though we look on it as a fun campaign, it is way, way more than that. It is a lifesaving campaign.

So if you could do \$72 that will provide 20 pairs of shoes. Can you imagine for \$180, 50 pairs of shoes? And we call it Shoes and Smiles because we want to go a little further. Some children are born with just terrible cleft lip and palate. That's a very expensive surgery normally but we work with some doctors who have said, "Listen, we will do this on a child for \$500."

So some of you could do that. Could you give \$500 to give a child their smile back? \$1,000 would give 275 pairs of shoes or two surgeries. That's what my husband Barry and I are doing for each other this Christmas. Instead of buying things that we don't need and we have no room for, we want to make a difference in the lives of so many children who are desperately needing our help. So let's do this together.

So would you go to your phone and make the very best gift possible? Go online, and let's change the lives of these little ones in Jesus' name.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Poverty is a killer and because of it children needlessly suffer, not only from a lack of food and clean water but also from a lack of things we often take for granted like a simple pair of shoes. Far too many children living in extreme poverty have never owned a new pair of shoes and while that may seem minor in light of all their

needs, walking with bare feet puts them at risk of life-threatening infections and disease that can lead to crippling consequences and even death.

By responding today you can help immediately secure and begin shipping Christmas Shoes to 150,000 children around the world and for many, just in time for the holidays! Your gift of \$36 will help provide 10 pairs of shoes, a gift of \$72 will help provide 20 pair and a gift of \$180 will help provide 50 pairs of Christmas Shoes for children in need.

As a thank you for your gift of support, be sure to request this beautifully crafted red crystal shoe ornament, a treasure to display at each Christmas. With your gift of \$100 or more you may request "The Light Shines in Darkness" frosted glass candle featuring a beautiful golden design that's scripture from John 1:5.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,000 or more to help provide 275 pairs of shoes or two children with corrective cleft palate surgeries and you may request the "Bridge of Faith" canvas print by Thomas Kinkade. Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of clip

On the mission field

James: Here is one group of the most beautiful children. These children are in Central America and these are just a few of the children that we want to bless with 200,000 pairs of shoes. You think about that! 200,000 kids and what it's going to do for their family.

I've said to you over and over, that it is one thing to pray for people but it's another thing to become an answer to somebody's prayer, someone's need. And the Bible tells us very clearly, in one place as an example, many places but one very clearly, Isaiah 58, that when you reach out and you touch those in need, then you call and God says, "I will answer quickly." We get our prayers answered.

And, Betty, it's been amazing to see what happened in our lives when we just began to bless others and giving shoes is one way to bless others.

Betty: It is! And to me, it is such a rewarding thing to do. We come over here to be a blessing but we always go back so much more blessed, James. Because we see what can be done, we see the needs here, but we know that our friends, because they love children, they love to give, they love to share -- that's you I'm talking about -- you love to help any need that we share with you. This is a real need -- shoes for the children!
End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much for responding. For any gift at all we're going to send you this darling little red shoe. If you're like me, I've got all my past Christmas Shoes on my tree and we did have a red one before, remember that? But it is kind of pewter; it is metal looking but this one is crystal. It is absolutely beautiful! And when you hang that on your tree it will be a reminder of the love of God that compels us to reach out. I think it will be so glorious if we reclaimed Christmas for Christ and it was not just about giving and giving and getting for ourselves but rather it was giving to those who genuinely have a need. Can you imagine the eyes of those children, the very first morning, Christmas morning they get a pair of shoes and you and I can do it.

Thank you so much for being with me. I'll see you next time in *Wednesdays in the Word*.