

1/29/19

Week five: WFL

Sheila Walsh

Set Free

Sheila: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. I thought I'd do something a little bit different today. I've had the opportunity of sharing other people's stories and talking about what God does in different people's lives and sharing biblical characters and how God met them but I got a little text a couple nights ago after I had been working with some ladies in Canada. One of them texted me and she said, "I've known your name for a long time and it was great that we all got to have dinner together tonight but at some point I'd really love to know your story."

So I thought, if you don't mind today that that's what I would maybe do. Share a little bit of my own story of the journey that God has had me on.

Now you can tell a few things about me upfront. Clearly, even though we live in Dallas, Texas now I was not born there. I was born in a small fishing town on the West Coast of Scotland. I was born into a family where my mom and my dad loved Jesus. Now that wouldn't be unusual here in the states or in some other countries but in Scotland, do you know that less than 7% of our entire population even go to church? So to have a mom and dad who didn't just go to church, but who loved Jesus and allowed that to impact Monday morning and Wednesday night and Friday evening was a real gift.

I have a sister Francis who is two years older than me and I had a little baby brother, Stephen had just been born. It was getting pretty close to Christmastime and the only thing I wanted for Christmas was a dog. I remember asking my dad, "Dad, do you think I could have a dog for Christmas?"

He said, "Well, honey, your mom has got three of you under seven, that's a lot. Maybe next year."

I said, "Oh dad! Please! Just a wee dog -- a three-legged dog -- anything!"

Well, on Christmas Eve my dad came into my bedroom. My sister and I were in our pajamas getting ready to go to sleep. He said, "Okay, I have an early Christmas gift and it is alive. I want you to close your eyes and hold out your hands."

Well, my sister Francis did not want to do that but I did. What my dad placed in my hands was the most beautiful little silky -eared dachshund. It was one of moments where you think life can't get any better.

But as many of you know, sometimes storms blow up from nowhere. Not very long after that my father was taken into intensive care. He had suffered a massive brain aneurysm and he was not expected to live. But he made enough of a recovery to be able to come home.

My mom explained to me that dad was a little different now. He had lost the ability to speak and was paralyzed down his left side. But I thought, he is still my dad and he is coming home. And things were good for a few weeks. But then the blood clot in his brain began to move and pressed on an area that affected his personality. My dad went from being this loving, funny, handsome, safe dad to an angry, confused and ultimately, violent stranger.

The thing that was very hard for me to understand as a child was until the very last day that he was in our home he only took his anger out on me, and only if it was just he and I in the room. I would walk past his chair and he would spit in my face. Or he would grab hold of a handful of my hair and pull it out. As a five-year old girl, all I could think of is that I have to try harder. I'm making my dad frustrated. But no matter how hard I tried, his anger, his temper got more and more.

On the very last day I saw my dad alive, I was actually sitting by the fire playing with my little dog Heidi and she did something she'd never done before. She started to growl and the hair on the back of her neck stood up. I turned just in time to see that my dad was about to bring his cane down on my skull. I don't honestly remember if I pushed him or if I pulled it but he lost his balance and hit the ground hard and he laid there roaring like an animal.

When my mom heard what was happening, she came out of the kitchen and when she saw where my dad was and the anger and the yelling, she took my brother and my sister and I and she locked us in a room while she dialed 911. It probably only took four or five minutes for help to get there but it felt like an eternity to me.

It took five men to carry my dad out of the house that day and he was taken to what was called back then our local lunatic asylum. He was 34 years old. And because he was becoming increasingly violent they placed him in the maximum security ward but all the men in there were in their 70s and 80s and had completely lost touch with reality. My dad hadn't. He would have moments when he realized where he was. He would sob into his hands.

So my mom asked my dad's doctor one day, "Could you possibly move Frank to a unit with some younger men?"

Which he eventually agreed to do but it was a less secure unit and my father managed to escape one night. They searched for him all through the night and they found him just as dawn was breaking the next morning. He had drowned himself in the river behind the hospital.

In those days, in Scotland, you didn't take children to a funeral or to a graveside. My only memory is of my mother coming home in a black dress with a black hat on and she took every single picture of my father off the walls and off the tables and she put them in a

little suitcase which she locked and pushed under the bed, and we never mentioned his name again. We went from being a noisy, fun household to a house that was quiet.

I'm sure my mom thought, if Sheila wants to talk I'll let her bring it up. She had no way of knowing the question that was going through my mind that tormented me. What did my dad see in me that made him hate me so much? If you have children, if you are around children you know this, children are the best recorders of information. You can think they're not listening, they're missing nothing. But they are the poorest interpreters of that information. Children always think it is something they did.

I grew up with a profound sense of shame. This is how I differentiate between shame and guilt. This is not a clinical definition but it helps me. I think if you and I bumped into each other in the road and I said something unkind to you, I would feel guilty until I had a chance to sit down and say, "Listen. Please forgive me. That was totally me."

So if guilt tells me I've done something wrong, shame tells me I *am* something wrong.

When I was 11, my mom took me to hear Scotland's only gospel group, a group called "The Heralds." I remember the evangelist at the end, Ian Leitch said, "God has no grandchildren. He just has sons and daughters."

Some people went forward that night to give their lives to Christ. I couldn't move. I was just so convicted of this possibility that perhaps I could give my life to Jesus. But it left me, literally, I couldn't get out of my seat. So that night when we got home I said to my mom, "Mom, do I have to wait to Sunday to give my life to Jesus?"

And she assured me that God is open 24/7. So that night my mom led me into a relationship with Jesus. She said something that would be good news to 99% of the population. That sometimes, have you noticed, we hear things through the broken window of our own experience. My mom said, "Sheila, not only is Jesus your savior and your Lord, you have a heavenly Father watching over you."

I remember clearly, at 11 years of age, thinking, wow! I've got one more chance to get it right. Whatever my earthly father saw in me that made him hate me so much, my heavenly Father is never going to see. I'm going to be the perfect Christian if it kills me. And it nearly did.

I found myself wondering, what kind of things happened to you in your childhood? Perhaps it wasn't physical abuse. For many, I know it was sexual abuse which leaves such a stain on your soul. Or verbal abuse where you were told, "I wish I never had you." "You'll never amount to anything." "You'll never change."

When we have those kinds of messages and that kind of shame heaped on us and we don't know what to do with it, we push it into the cellar of our souls and we find some way of going on, some mask to wear. Sometimes we turn to drugs or to alcohol. Some people turn to relationships, just one after another. Sometimes, as women, and perhaps guys too, I don't know, we spend too much money on clothes because we think if I look better on the outside, perhaps I'll feel better on the inside.

I found the perfect place to hide: Christian ministry. Think about it. Nobody is going to come up to me and say, "Put that Bible down or we're going to have an intervention." But God is the only one who knows whether we're serving out of pain or passion, out of a calling or a wound so deep we don't know where else to hide.

So I went to seminary in London. And when I graduated I worked with youth for Christ, I worked with Billy Graham and his crusades, and I came to America as a contemporary Christian artist. But I was up in Canada with Billy Graham and I was on a show, 100 Huntley Street, and someone from the 700 Club saw the program and took this V.H.S. tape (do you remember those?) to Pat Robertson and said, "I know you're looking for a new co-host for the 700 Club. What do you think of this girl?"

So I was invited to come in and co-host with Pat for three days. I was terrible. I

couldn't -- I was not up with all the news and all the stuff I should have known. But after the first day, Pat and his wife, DeDe took me out for lunch and said, "You clearly have a lot of work to do but we believe that you're the person that God has called to this ministry."

So here's the truth. From 1987 to 1992, five years I sat on television every day and I talked to people about the love of God, about the grace of God. I would read my favorite verses from Romans 8:37-38: There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. But here is absolute truth. Inside, I was still the same scared little girl who wouldn't let anybody get close to her in case you saw what my dad saw. I kept a wall around my heart. Do you know it is possible to be very well-known and desperately lonely?

Well, one day God set up a rescue plan I would never have signed up for. One of my mom's favorite verses is Jeremiah 29, where it says: "I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. I used to say to her, "Mom, I would just like to see the plans. If I could make a few suggestions then I could sign off on the plan." But God is the one who knows the plans.

One day on live television the guest turned the table on me and asked me a kind question and I didn't have time to pull up that wall and I fell apart. Literally, it was as if she took the first brick out of the wall and I just crumbled on the air. I felt so ashamed. I took off my microphone and I hid in my dressing room until I felt everyone would have gone home. I felt as if my life was over.

If you've spent your whole life or your relationship with God based on what you bring to the table and suddenly you fall apart where do you go? I called a friend of mine, a guy called Dr. Henry Cloud. I said, "Henry, I think I'm losing my mind."

He said, "You're not but you need some help and you need it quickly."

So imagine this. I go from being on live television in the morning and by that evening I'm in the locked ward of a psychiatric hospital. I remember sitting in my car before I walked through those doors that I knew would lock behind me just sobbing and saying, "Lord, how is it possible to spend your whole life trying to get it all right and end up in a place that says it's all wrong?"

Here's what I want you to know. Sometimes God will take you to a prison to set you free. Some of God's most beautiful gifts come in boxes that make your hands bleed when you open them but inside is what you've been longing for all your life, a relationship with Jesus based on nothing you brought to the table.

It is interesting. When you're committed to a psych hospital, even if it was a voluntary thing you cannot leave for 72 hours -- I was there for a month -- but for 72 hours no one can come see you and you can't leave. But you know what I discovered? The Lamb of God checked in with me. I remember lying on the floor sobbing and being so aware of two things: My utter worthlessness and hopelessness, and this overwhelming love of God. I actually wrote in the back of my Bible, "I never knew you lived so close to the floor."

The first morning when I met with my psychiatrist he said, "Who are you?"

And I said, "Sheila. Sheila Walsh."

He said, "No, Sheila, I know your name. Who are you?"

"Um, I'm the co-host of the 700 Club."

He said, "No. I didn't ask what you do. I asked who are you?"

I said, "I have no idea."

And he said, "I know that and that's why you are here."

It was the most amazing experience to have everything stripped away and to be with other people who love Jesus, because I was in a Christian unit in a psych hospital, but didn't have all the answers. I call it "the companionship of brokenness." What I discovered in that place is that it's never been about you and I getting it all right. It's always been about the finished work of Jesus.

I don't know what you're hiding. I don't know what makes you feel like you're not worthy but I want you to know when you come to the end of yourself you discover the truth of Psalm 34. We read these words: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

Now you may have just flicked to this program and something made you stop. It may have been my funny accent and you think, I really don't know about this God or this religion. It is no accident -- it is no accident that you are here right now because what I want you to know is that God loves you, not for the things that you got right, and he doesn't love you less for the things you got wrong, he simply wants a relationship with you based on nothing you bring to the table.

It was at my lowest I remembered the words of a hymn my grandmother used to sing to me when I was just a wee girl, "Rock of ages cleft for me. Let me hide myself in thee." And then these two lines, "Nothing -- nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling." And I finally got it. I'm not the good news, Jesus is.

Maybe you used to consider yourself part of the family of God and you just got disillusioned and fed up with some of the stupid things we say sometimes. And maybe somebody really hurt you and you just think, I don't think I want anything to do with that. I just want to ask you, do you think today might be time to come home? Not to a father who is judging you but to a father that stands with open arms who has been saying, "I've been waiting for you."

It is amazing what God will do with a broken life when you give him every single one of the pieces. You are seen. You are known. You are loved. And honestly, it is out of that ridiculous, extravagant grace that it is my heart's desire to bring a message of hope to some people who have very little hope at the moment. Would you watch this?

On the mission field

Tammy: When you lose someone you love unexpectedly, it can feel like your whole world is falling apart. It's almost too much to bear. If you know my story, you know I lost my husband in 2001 to a tragic scuba diving accident. I'd give just about anything to go back in time and stop that from happening. While I know God has never abandoned me, I've learned some memories stay with you for the rest of your life.

Recently, in east Africa, I got to visit people with some very fresh memories, people who lost loved ones of their own. In a way I feel connected to them. My husband died in the water and her husband died because of water and the lack of good clean water. Because the water they need to drink every day in order to live was killing them. Water that looks like this -- and this. Water that looks like this.

These precious people don't have a choice in the water they drink. Right now it is this or it is nothing. But you and I have a choice, a life and death choice. Not life and death for us but for them.

So will you please choose to partner with *LIFE Outreach* today? Will you help give Water for LIFE so that we can give them water like this?

[Children laughing]

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Wow! What a contrast. Water like this? That muddy, filthy water where the animals are walking through, where they have to do their laundry because there is no other place, and that's what your children have to drink?

Or water right at the end as you saw, that water like this that is running forth -- free, clean, life-giving water. That's why we call it Water for LIFE for so many reasons. We have a heart's desire and a commitment to put 200 new water wells at the beginning of this year into 15 different nations. And it is very doable.

I want to show you how we kind of break it down so that there's room for you and I and for everybody else to scoot up to the table and say, "Okay, here's what I can do." So for \$48, do you know that you can give clean water to ten people for the rest of their life? If you see those wells they look a little primitive but let me tell you about them. They dig them really deep and then they're absolutely lined in steel so that they're kept intact, and they last for 70 years.

The reason it looks like a fairly simple kind of pump is that in many of these villages there is no electricity so it has to be a hand pump. There's also something kind of special about it being able to be used by children. When children can move that and get that clean water. So that's why we call it Water for LIFE. It will last about 70 years.

So can you do \$48? Could you do that and give ten people water -- clean water, disease-free water for the rest of their life? Some of you might think, you know what? We can do more than that. God has really blessed us and out of that fullness we want to be a blessing to others.

So if you are able to give \$144 that will provide clean, beautiful, pure, pristine water for 30 people for their life. And I know that some of you, I talked to a lady just the other day and she said, "God has blessed my husband and I and now that he is safely home, in his name I'm putting two water wells in." Isn't that awesome? So if you're able to do that,

\$4800 will put a well into a village that will provide clean water for 1,000 people. Isn't that amazing?

So what can you do? Can you give your very best gift possible? There's a number on your screen. Please call that number and give what you have. Don't give what you don't have. Don't give out of guilt. Give out of joy that we get to do this. But please, give the very best gift you can. Thank you!

Begin video clip

Announcer: Today, a mother living in extreme poverty will do the unthinkable -- give her children dirty, diseased-filled water that she knows could kill them. With no other choice what's a mother to do?

With your help, clean water is on the way. Mission Water for LIFE provides a way for parents to save the lives of their children, to offer them a bright future free from the fear of death. With your gift today, you can help drill and establish the first 200 water wells of the year. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five children, a gift of \$48 will help provide for 10, \$72 will provide for 15, and \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime.

With your gift, we'll send you the *Praying Grace* 55-day devotional. This new devotional will help you renew your mind to the realities of God's grace and help you pray powerful grace-based prayers for each day.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "Praying Grace" tumbler. This reusable 16-ounce container is constructed with insulated stainless steel, perfect for hot or cold beverages.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people, or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well and you may request the beautiful, new commemorative bronze sculpture, "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of clip

On the mission field

Randy: This is one of the coolest things ever. This well right here can go up to 300 feet. It can get down to where the water is pure and clean because in villages around here and places all around the world just like this, sometimes their only source of water at times of the year is dirty, it is contaminated. When people only have contaminated water, they have no choice but to drink it.

There is no substitute for clean drinking water. That's why the Water for LIFE outreach is so critical, so important! We need to put these in more places. They work. This is success. Will you help us extend the Water for LIFE program? Will you help us drill even more wells so that we can give life around the world? Remember, when you give to Water for LIFE you give water and life!

Sheila: Isn't that a joy? It is not some obligation. It is just this great gift that God has made possible. That's what I love about our partners around the world. They make it possible for you and I to be missionaries. You probably can't go to Africa but we can go in your name and put a water well in.

So please keep calling. Make this a commitment this year that -- it is kind of what my husband and I have made. We don't want this year to be about us and anything that we need. We want it to be about doing the work of Jesus.

So for any gift at all we have this great book, *Praying Grace*, 55-day devotional or I'll send you my book, *It's Okay Not to Be Okay*.

So for all of us here, the whole family at *LIFE Today*, thanks so much for watching. I'm Sheila Walsh and I'll see you next time.