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Wednesdays in the Word
Sheila Walsh: In the Darkest Moments of Life

Sheila: Hi, I'm Sheila Walsh. I want to say welcome to *Wednesdays in the Word*. It was really fun for me, not so long ago to be in Cape Town, South Africa and to meet so many of you who say, "Hey, we watch *LIFE Today* with James and Betty. And we watch *Wednesdays in the Word*." And it was just so lovely to think that through the medium of television we can go all sorts of places, Australia, the United Kingdom, and South Africa. I'm also grateful for the fact that many of you will drop me little notes; you'll maybe put them on my Facebook page.

But one of the things I read recently that really struck a chord with me because I thought it was a very valid question and it was basically this: What do you do when God just doesn't show up in time? You're praying about something and it is not a selfish thing. It is something that you really believe God would want and you pray and you pray but it seems as if God is not listening or not there. That can lead to a lot of disillusionment and a lot of disappointment.

So that's what I want us to look at today. And I wanted to ask you, just to pause for a minute and ask yourself, has God's timing ever disappointed you? Have you needed God to show up within a specific timeframe and he just doesn't? When God doesn't answer when you need him to answer you, I was wondering what kind of conclusions do you come to about yourself or about God? Are you tempted to think, what did I do wrong? Does God hear my prayers? Why did he answer his prayer and not mine?

Well, in John Chapter 11 we read a really amazing story about a man called Lazarus. You probably know he was one of Jesus' closest friends but when Lazarus needed him the most Jesus didn't come. Other than the death and resurrection of Christ, the story of what happened to Lazarus is one of the most amazing miracles but it's only told in one gospel, the gospel of John. We're going to see why that was so in a moment.

Lazarus died and he was going into his fourth day in the grave. Well, you would imagine anyone who saw a miracle like that when Jesus called him back would never ever doubt again "A" who Jesus was, and "B" that God was on this earth and moving. But that's

actually not what happened.

In John 11:45 we read this: Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus but when they saw this happen, (this miracle) some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

Later on in John Chapter 12, verses 9-11 we read this: When all the people heard of Jesus' arrival they flocked to see him and also to see Lazarus the man Jesus had raised from the dead. Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus.

Wow! Have you ever been tempted to think that miracles would change you? Have you ever thought if I'd only been there? If I'd just seen some of these miracles it would be so much easier for me today to believe. But I think what that passage shows us is that's not true. Miracles don't change us. Obedience to Christ is what changes us.

So let's take a look at Lazarus's story. In John Chapter 11, first three verses here's what we read: Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

I think that's interesting because even though Lazarus is not a name that's used in our day, it probably was then. They wanted to make sure that the messenger got it clear. It is not Lazarus the baker, or Lazarus who looks after sheep, Lord, it is our Lazarus. It's the one that you love. Now they don't have a single doubt that he will come. If you think about it, they'd seen Jesus heal total strangers and they were some of Jesus' closest friends.

Now from where they were and where Jesus was at that point, it was about 20 miles, a good days walk. So they sent a messenger, it would take a day to get the message to him and a day to get back. Now I just imagine Mary kneeling by Lazarus's bed, her beloved brother and saying, "Lazarus, hold on! Hold on! You know the minute that Jesus knows that you're sick he will be here."

But Jesus doesn't come. In fact, here's what we read: Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

Now why? Why would Jesus do that? Why would he wait? Even though he knew he was going to go and eventually bring back Lazarus from the dead, why would he do that

to people he loved? Why would he put Mary and Martha through all that pain knowing that he could just go immediately and save Lazarus's life?

Have you ever been in a place like that? You needed God to move now. I remember that with my mother-in-law Eleanor. When she got very sick with liver cancer she desperately, desperately wanted God to heal her. I remember her asking me to take her to one or two healing ministries where she had heard of great miracles. So I went with her; took her to both of those places and God didn't answer her prayer. The thing that was hard for me to hear was my mother-in-law believed it was because God didn't love her as much as he loved other people. Her thoughts to me were, it must be something in my past. It must be some things that I've done. That must be the reason that God is not healing me.

It took me a long, long time sitting with Eleanor, praying with her, praying for her to help her understand that sometimes we just don't understand God's ways. His ways are higher than ours but it does not mean that God does not love you every bit as much as he loves the person who gets the miracle they've been longing for.

Well, when Jesus decides to stay, the disciples are relieved because the last time they'd been in Judea the people had tried to stone Jesus so they were very glad. But then on that third day Jesus said to them, "Okay, now we're going." And they're like, "Lord, why? Why on earth are you going now? Don't you remember what happened? If you go back there your life is on the line."

I sometimes think the answers that Christ gave his disciples, I'm thinking, if I'd been one of them I would be like, what? Because here's what Jesus said to their answer of a very simple question, "Lord, why are we going now?"

And this is how Jesus responded: "Are there not 12 hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles for he has no light."

I just imagine myself thinking, what? What does that have to do with what I just asked you? I think it is interesting to note that in verse 16 it's Thomas, you know the one we call "doubting Thomas" who actually says, "You know what? Let's go too and die with Jesus."

Now the fact that Lazarus had been dead for four days was very significant in those days. It changed everything. Earlier in John's gospel we read accounts of two other people being brought back to life but they'd only been dead for hours. You probably know this

but it was Jewish custom to coat the bodies in spices but they were never embalmed so the body was placed in the grave the same day that they died.

What they would do in those days is they would have someone watching the grave 24 hours for the first three days for two reasons. Because they didn't embalm the body they listened at the grave because sometimes there is reported cases of someone who had actually slipped into a coma. They actually weren't dead and they had been placed in their tomb. And maybe like come to a day afterwards and they're like, "Hoy! Yo! I'm still alive in here."

So for three days someone would listen; they would take shifts. But there was also another very bizarre belief in those days. They believed, the Jewish people believed that the spirit of the dead could visit for the first three days; almost come back and take a look at their body and say, "You know what? I don't think I'm quite finished with this. I wouldn't mind doing this again." But after the third day it would never happen. No one had ever come back to life on the fourth day.

So Jesus arrives and the minute that Martha hears that Jesus has come she runs out and she asks him, "Why didn't you come?" It made no sense to her and it hurt her. It's like, Lord, this is Lazarus. We've had you in our home. We love you! You're like family to us. Why didn't you come?

Have you ever been there? Where you're just like, come on, Lord! You know I love you. What I was asking for wasn't something selfish. Maybe you've been praying for your marriage or praying for a child who is sick and you're like Lord, why? I believe you're powerful and I believe you're loving and holding those two things together, the fact that you didn't answer makes no sense.

Well, Jesus turned to Martha and said, "He's going to rise again." Well, Martha didn't understand what Jesus meant by that and she said, "I know he'll rise again, finally at the resurrection." That wasn't what Jesus meant. Well, Mary, she had been in the house. She was sitting with friends who were just weeping with her. But when she heard that Jesus was here, she ran out. And typical of who Mary was, she fell at Jesus' feet sobbing. And through her tears she was able to say, "Lord, if you'd been here my brother would not have died."

When Christ saw the level of Mary's pain, and the crowd around her were mourning and weeping, we read that he was deeply troubled. But the word used in the Greek here, it is a word that you would use for like a violent thunderstorm or a horse just snorting. There is rage in it. I really believe it was because Christ knew it was never supposed to be like

this. This was never God's original plan. No woman was ever supposed to bury a child. No one was ever supposed to go through breast cancer. No one was ever supposed to lose a loved one. When Jesus saw that there was just a level of rage in him against the fall and what has happened to us all.

But then we read this. Shortest verse in scripture but so full of meaning: Jesus wept.

Never imagine for one moment that Christ does not weep with those who weep. I wanted to bring something in and show it to you. It is very little. It's a tear bottle. Its cobalt blue, silver filigree, and a little top that comes off. What would happen in those days, if a funeral procession was going through town, and the way they did it in those days, they had such reverence for a funeral service that everyone would come out of their homes and follow behind. But for the widow or the widower, they would be given a little tear bottle and as they would walk to the grave they catch every tear. When they finally reached the place where the body was buried, they would place the top back on and that little tear bottle would be placed beside the loved one as if to say, "This is how much you are loved."

I want you to know this verse. Psalm 56, verse eight says this speaking of God: "You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all of my tears in your bottle. You've recorded each one in your book."

Do you know that not one tear that you have ever cried has fallen to the floor unnoticed? You may have been tempted to say there is no one on this earth who understands the depth of my pain. God caught every single tear. Why? I don't know. Maybe because he wants us to know he understands the weight.

Well, Jesus prays and then he does something that shocks Martha. He asked them to roll the stone away from the graveside. Well, she is totally panicked. He has been dead for four days. They don't embalm the bodies, this is not going to be pleasant. But Jesus turned to her and looks her right in the eyes and says to Martha, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believed?"

I don't know about you but have you ever been in a place of panic? You just don't know what's going on. You don't understand. In the darkest moments in life, I believe that Jesus looks right at our fear, right through our fear and says to you and to me, "Trust me."

Well then, Jesus addresses Lazarus. We know it as, "Lazarus, come forth." Or "Lazarus, come out." If you look at the actual literal translation it is almost as if Jesus is saying, "Lazarus, it's this way out."

Can you imagine? This man has been dead for four days and suddenly in a moment his spirit reenters his body and there is silence outside -- silence outside the cave. Then suddenly, Lazarus appears at the entrance to the tomb still with his arms and his legs bandaged and Jesus told them, "Unwrap them."

It split the crowd. I think it is something that happens in life. When Jesus calls us back to life it demands a response. You might experience what Lazarus and his friends experienced. Perhaps you've been dead in your faith and suddenly, Jesus calls you back to life. Not everyone is going to understand and celebrate. I don't know what circumstances you find yourself in right now but I want to read something I read the other day by one of my favorite authors, Warren Wiersbe. He said this: "You can view Christ through your circumstances or you can view your circumstances through Christ."

There is nothing that you're going through that God doesn't understand. There is no pain that you've experienced that God does not know. There is no tear that has fallen that he has not caught. And even though sometimes we have to wait and wait for an answer, let me tell you, my dear brothers and sisters, it is never because God doesn't love you. His timing is perfect. And sometimes we have to walk through tragedies. Paul calls it the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

I don't always understand God's ways. I don't understand why my father committed suicide at 34. I don't understand a lot of things but I've come to the place in my own faith where I don't need to understand everything because I trust his heart. God is for you.

One of the things we get to do here at LIFE and it is probably one of my favorite things, is that we get to reach out with that love to people in places in the world who are struggling. I'm going to tell you how you and I can make a difference. Would you watch this with me?

On the mission field

[Rooster crowing]

Announcer: Life -- carefree, nurturing, loving, secure. Universal needs for children and parents alike, yet in many places of the world such qualities are threatened every day by a simple and basic need -- water!

Open Captions:

>> During the dry season, water is very hard to find. But our water source, year round is dirty and diseased. Sometimes our whole family gets sick. As a mother, it is so painful to be unable to provide for your kids. When my daughter was three years old, I gave her the water. It caused her to start vomiting. She became very, very sick. She had diarrhea and her stomach was bloated. I didn't know what to do.

Announcer: At that point, nothing could be done. Her daughter fell unconscious and never again awoke. Nown knew the cause.

Open Captions:

>> No words can express the regret I feel for giving her that water...
But what choice did I have? Now, I'm so afraid the water will also take my son. If I lose my son I will have nothing to live for.

Announcer: The lifesaving solution of clean water is so incredibly simple. However, it is one we can only deliver with your help today.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: I do it every day and I don't even think about it -- I pour myself a glass of water. I don't know how many times a day I do it and I don't even think this is great. I just think, this is what we do -- this is life. To think that so many mothers, fathers, grandparents in other countries around the world cannot simply give their children a glass of clean water.

I've walked with these moms, I've been in so many of the countries that we're working in and I've walked sometimes for a mile with a mom and her little ones. And when I found what their water source is I was horrified! There were animals in the same water. The water was filthy! And yet, so many mothers say, "What choice do I have? I give them this water or I give them no water."

It used to be, a long time ago, these things would go on and we had no idea but life has changed, now we know and I believe, as a Christian that we are accountable for what we know. Once you've seen something, once you've seen a need you cannot look away. If you can send \$48, do you know that that will give ten people not a glass of water, it will give them water for the rest of their life? Some of you can do a little bit more. If you can do like \$144 that would give 30 people water for the rest of their life. That's why we call

it Water for LIFE because when we put a well in a village it will last like 70 years.

Now some of you would be able to do more. God has blessed you. And do you know what? If you could give \$4800 that would do a complete well! I want to go back to these villages and instead of seeing a mother's tears of grief see a mother's tears of absolute joy that God has answered her prayers.

So please, would you stand with us? Will you go to your phone and make the best gift possible? If you don't have a lot, give what you have. If you have a lot, give out of your abundance. But if you and I will do something we can change the world. And then those mothers will not have to bury one more child because they couldn't give them clean water. Let's change that! Let's change that in Jesus' name.

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

Ralph: We're standing here today at a water source in a village in Cambodia. It appears to be three boys having a great time just drinking, playing in the water, and that's a great thing. But what we've discovered is the water is so filthy. So when they're drinking this water, what should be a life-sustaining source for them and their families, it's actually bringing danger and disease and sickness to their lives. We've heard stories already where children have died from drinking this water.

The good news is this, this doesn't have to be their daily reality. We can make a difference. We have the ability to give and do the work that's necessary to bring clean water to this village that will bring life to these little boys and not death. So please, go to your phone, go online, whichever is easiest for you and give that generous gift today that we can make a true difference for children in the world today.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you! Thank you for caring. Thank you for reaching out. So many of you have done it over so many years and yet you continue to stand with us and we're so grateful.

And for any gift at all we're going to send you this amazing book. I know you don't give expecting to get something back but we love to be able to sow something back into your life, to strengthen your faith.

So if you tried to call and the lines were busy or you went online and maybe something happened, maybe your computer crashed, don't give up! I think one of the greatest attributes of someone who seriously understands her faith is persistence. So let's do this

together in Jesus' name. I'll see you next time on *Wednesdays in the Word*.