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Week 18

Sheila Walsh

“The Gift of Grace”

Sheila: I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. So glad you could join us. And I hope you can stay for the whole program because I've got some amazing things I want to show you toward the end, ways that you and I can actually physically make a difference in this world.

I got a letter from, I think she said she was a 15-year old girl the other day, and she was talking about grace. She said, "It's a concept I've heard since I was tiny. Mom and dad take me to church and I hear about grace. And I hear about amazing grace and all of that but sometimes I feel as if God has forgotten about me. I see God answering the prayers of other friends of mine in school or in church but sometimes I wonder, God, do you still see me? Do you still care about me?"

Obviously, I wrote back to her and talked about her concerns. But it made me think, and kind of dive deep into the Word of God. I don't know how much you read the Bible. I don't know whether it is kind of a last resort but for me it is like the first place I go to because there is nothing that you and I are going to face today or tomorrow that's not addressed in the Word of God.

Well, I thought about this whole idea of feeling maybe forgotten or passed over and of all the stories of grace found in God's word the one, apart obviously, from the cross of Christ that moves me most is found tucked deep into the heart of King David's story. And it's kind of an obscure passage about the man whose name I can barely pronounce. I will give it a shot: Mephibosheth. Actually, that's right, Mephibosheth. Well, his story is found in

Second Samuel chapter nine and it is during the highest point in David's reign right before his sin with Bathsheba.

Well, the Israelite army had destroyed thousands of its enemies. In fact, we read this: The Lord made David victorious wherever he went. Israel had never been in a stronger place. As David took time to reflect on the past he remembered a promise he'd made to his very best friend Jonathan. Do you remember the incident in the field where Jonathan told David he would send a sign by arrows to let him know whether it was safe to come back to the palace or not.

We find that passage in First Samuel Chapter 20 and this is what Jonathan said: "If my father speaks favorably about you he said I'll let you know. But if he is angry and wants you killed may the Lord strike me and even kill me if I don't warn you so you can escape and live. May the Lord be with you as he used to be with my father." What sad words! "And may you treat me with the faithful love of the Lord as long as I live."

But Jonathan went on to say this. "But if I die, treat my family with this faithful love even when the Lord destroys all your enemies from the face of the earth."

I don't know if you know this but it was the custom in those days that when a new king ascended the throne all the descendants of the previous king were slaughtered to remove even the possibility of a revolt. What a barbaric custom! But that's how they did it. Well Jonathan asked David to show grace to his family if he was no longer there. And David said he would.

Well not only had David made a promise to his beloved friend, you might remember he also made a promise to Saul, to King Saul, Jonathan's father. This is what Saul said to David in one of his more lucid moments because he really had become a mad man. He said, "And now I realize that you are surely going to be king." Saul told him, "And that the kingdom of Israel will flourish under your rule. Now swear to me by the Lord that when that happens you will not kill my family and destroy my line of descendants." The

Bible tells us that David promised this to Saul with an oath.

Keeping a promise like that would have meant very little to King Saul. There is nothing sadder than when you sense the Holy Spirit has left someone. But David was a different man. David was a man of his word. What could he now do to honor this promise because by this point Saul and Jonathan are both dead? And as far as David knew there would be no survivors in their line. But still David determined that he wanted to find out.

We read, "Is anyone in Saul's family still alive? Anyone to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

Do you see the grace tucked into those words? He didn't ask if there was anyone *noble* left. He asked, "Is there anyone left?" See, that's what grace is. Grace says it doesn't matter who you are, you get to come as you are.

Well David called for Ziba, one of Saul's former servants and he asked him if he knew of anyone from Saul's line who was still alive. Well, Ziba said, "Yes. One of Jonathan's sons is still alive." But then he added this, "He's crippled in both feet."

I wonder why he told him that detail? Was he trying to let David know that this crippled man probably wouldn't fit in in this beautiful luxurious palace? Well, this man, Mephibosheth was the only survivor of King Saul's line, and he had suffered a lot -- a lot over his lifetime.

In Second Samuel Chapter 4 we find out what actually happened to him. Mephibosheth was five years old when the report came from Jezreel that Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle. Well, when the little boy's nurse heard the news she picked him up and hurried out of the palace. But as she hurried away she dropped him and we read that he became crippled. I can only imagine the scene.

The nurse didn't know the promise that David had made to Saul or to Jonathan so when

she heard that they were both dead she knew she had to get this boy out of the palace before David's men would kill the one who would now stand in line to be heir to the throne. And we don't know whether she tripped or if he struggled in her arms but he fell so hard that he broke his legs and had been crippled ever since.

Now Mephibosheth lived in a place called Lo-debar, which translates as "no pasture land." It is kind of a descriptive picture of his life. For years he had been hidden away in a barren, grassless place until grace would come looking for him.

Well, I can't imagine what he must have thought when David's men knocked at the door. When you have soldiers come to knock at the door I'm sure it's not a little polite, "Avon calling." Perhaps he'd spent years waiting for the other shoe to drop knowing he should have been killed when he was a child; waiting to be discovered. And now the very thing he dreaded had come to pass.

Well, the men took him. They took him to Jerusalem right into the king's palace. Mephibosheth bowed low to the ground. I'm sure heart beating fast in his chest, expecting the worse. We know that because of how King David responds to him. This is what David said, "Don't be afraid." He went on to say, "I intend to show kindness to you because of my promise to your father, Jonathan. I will give you all the property that once belonged to your grandfather Saul and you will eat here with me at the King's table."

I can imagine him just seeing the fear etched on this broken man's face but grace soaked this crippled man to the skin. Not only would his life be spared, everything that used to belong to his grandfather would now be his. But grace, grace goes beyond. The grace that was shown to him was even greater than that. He was offered a seat at King David's table. He was welcomed home as family.

Isn't that what we all want? We all want to be wanted, to belong, and to be given what we know we don't deserve, but oh boy, do we long for it! I could imagine the scene at dinner time. David is seated at the head of the table, his sons and daughter gathered there.

And then as Chuck Swindoll wrote in his beautiful book, *What's So Amazing about Grace*, this is how Chuck described it: "They hear the clump, clump, clump, clump and here comes Mephibosheth hobbling along. He smiles and humbly joins the others as he takes his place at the table as one of the King's sons. And the table cloth of grace covers his feet."

What a beautiful picture! Just as David, out of love for Jonathan, lavished grace on his child so God, out of his great love for Christ, gives you and me a place at the table; not just as invited guests but as sons and daughters.

It's hard to grasp the depth of this kind of welcoming love. We're invited to come just as we are with our limps and crutches and zero qualifications. David could have restored Saul's wealth to Mephibosheth and sent him off but he did so much more than that. He made him a son. And when you've been shown that kind of grace, you long to share it with others.

I've told you on past programs that I had spent a month in a psychiatric hospital in the 1990s but a couple of weeks after I was released Ruth Bell Graham, Billy Graham's wife invited me to spend a couple of days at their North Carolina home. I remember flying into Asheville airport and one of their staff picked me up and drove me 30 minutes to the house set high in the beautiful Carolina mountains. Ruth met me at the gate and introduced me to their two ginormous German shepherd dogs. Apparently, it was very important that they knew I was a friend so I was glad she did that.

Well, it was a lovely afternoon and we sat outside in our rocking chairs drinking iced tea and enjoying the quiet. I think that Ruth could see that I was tired so after dinner she showed me to my bedroom and asked if I'd like a cup of tea. It is a memory that I treasure. As far as I remember, Billy and his team were off doing a crusade so Ruth and I and the two dogs had the place to ourselves.

There was a high bed with little wooden steps beside it and crisp white linens that Ruth told me she bought one time on a trip to Switzerland. I was tucked up in bed when she came back with my tea and asked if she could read to me. She sat at the bottom of the bed with an old Scottish book, *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* by a man called Ian MacLaren.

And she thumbed through the well-worn pages, I could tell she's read it many times, until she found what she was looking for. A beautiful story called "The Transformation of Lachlan Campbell." Ruth asked me if I knew the story but I didn't. So she said it's about a young girl, Flora Campbell whose mother had died. And her father was a strict judgmental man, and he was now raising her. Their home was a truly graceless place. Her father's rules were so confining. She always felt like a failure, that she didn't live up to the standards of her religious father. So one day she ran away. She went all the way to London. Her dad was so furious that he removed her name from the family Bible. She was miserable, completely alone in London.

Well, one night she made her way into a church, Ruth continued, and she began to read to me. "You maybe know that I wouldn't be able to hide herself. And I crept into the shadow of a church and I wept. Then the people and the noise and the houses passed away like the mist on the hills of Scotland and I was walking to the Kirk," Scottish word for church, "with my father. Oh yes! And I saw you all in your places and I heard the Psalms.

And I could see through the window the green fields and the trees on the edge of the moor. And I saw my home with the dogs before the door and the flowers that I planted and the lamb coming for her milk. And I heard myself singing and I awoke. But there was singing and it was beautiful too because the dark church was open and the light was falling over my head.

"And I heard this hymn, there is a fountain filled with blood." Ruth paused for a moment and she said, "Life is unbearable without grace. They both needed it, the daughter and the father."

This is my favorite part for Flora makes her way home. Well, Ruth continued to read to me. "When she reached the door her strength had departed and she was not able to knock. But there was no need for the dogs who never forget, are never cast off, we're bidding her welcome with short joyous yelps of delight. And she could hear her father feeling for the latch, which for once could not be found. And saying nothing but, 'Flora! Flora!' Just like the prodigal son, she'd made up some kind of speech so her dad would accept her home but the only word she ever heard said was, 'Father!' As he came running to her and he'd never kissed her all the days of her life but he grabbed her and he held her close sobbing out her name and calling blessings over her head while the dogs licked her hands with their soft kindly tongues."

I'll never forget that night or the grace that was lavished all over me by Ruth Graham. I want you to know, yeah, that was a privilege. I mean I would never have imagined some little Scottish girl growing up without a dad on the West Coast of Scotland -- who would have ever thought that at some point, particularly at the worst point in my life, having just been released from a psych hospital would be sitting in Ruth Graham's home having her read a story?

Here's what I want you to know. God wants to lavish that kind of grace on you as well. It doesn't matter what you have gone through, it doesn't matter where you've come from, God loves you. So often we think, well if I could just clean myself up. And grace says no! Come as you are.

And maybe when you think of the story of Mephibosheth, there were many years when it felt as if perhaps grace would never come looking for him. But it's no accident that that story is included, just tucked in there. And the great tale of the greatest king that Israel had ever known, there's a story of a little boy whose legs were broken and walked with a limp the rest of his life until grace came looking for him.

Perhaps in some ways you feel that you were kind of crippled in your childhood. I

understand that. But I want you to know that grace comes looking for you; finds you where you are, in a place perhaps that feels like a barren, graceless place and invites you not just to come into the house for a cup of tea and a story read but gives you a seat at the table and calls you a son or a daughter.

If you don't know this love I ask you today would you open your heart to God? And simply say, "God, I want to know that kind of love. I want to be your son. I want to be your daughter. I know I need to be forgiven but thank you Jesus that you died for me so that I could live."

It doesn't matter whether you're watching this program in a homeless shelter, in a palace, whether you're on one side of the world or the other, grace comes knocking at the door for each one of us and says, "Come on, take a seat at the table."

But there is some other people I mentioned at the top of the show, you and I are going to get to do something historical and make a difference. What I'd love you to do is will you please watch this video? And then I'll come back and tell you how we can make a difference.

On the mission field

Announcer: There is a crisis in areas of South Sudan because mothers have no food for their children. Emotions run high among our mission team as these scenes of desperation play out. Isak Pretorius is motivated more than ever to carry on the fight against starvation on the continent of Africa that his dad Peter Pretorius began over 40 years ago.

Isak: James, you know, you and dad, you traveled all over this continent. And God took your heart and my dad's heart, and literally knitted them together. You became the best of friends. But more than that, you became the best of servants to this continent. I can tell you this because it makes me recommit my life, recommit my promise that I made to my dad that we will continue to serve our continent, that we will serve the people of this

continent, that we will continue to strive for what was his dream and is mine, and that is that no child go hungry.

The situation here at the moment is desperate. It is really is at a crisis level. We've been to villages here where mothers have told us how their children have died because they have literally starved to death.

So I'm asking you please, James, from the bottom of my heart, speak to the viewers. Ask them -- ask them to do whatever it is they can do. Appeal to them, James because we need your help today! And I know that you know that they are the true heroes, the ones that make it possible for us to be here. The ones that make it possible for us to save lives are the true heroes. But without them, another child dies today because we didn't get there in time.

Please, James, do whatever you can do because this is about life and death.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: I cannot even begin to imagine the life of that mom. That is not a woman in Africa, that is our sister. She happened to be born in Africa and I happened to be born in Scotland. But to think that you would have children and that your child would cry out and say, "Mom, I'm hungry!" And you not to be able to give them anything.

You see that little shack that she was living in? It looked like something I used to build for fun in the backyard for my son. That's their home because now that she has lost her husband she's completely on her own. She's lost her four-year old. So they'll move. As they use up anything that's on the ground, they'll move on to some area and try to find something else.

But you know what blew me away most? She said, "All I can do is pray and ask God to help." She's not cursing God. She's not saying there is no God. She's asking God for help. Well, then God asks us do you hear her cry? And I say yes, we do! We have made a commitment to feed 400,000 children in Africa. They are waiting for that. That's the promise we've made to our workers on the ground there.

But Betty once said something that I think is so profound. She said, "We never want the line of children to be longer than the amount of food we have." So we have to keep it up.

But we can do it for so little. The thing that's amazing to me about mission feeding is every single one of us can do something. Do you know that \$30 will feed three children for three months? Three months! \$50 feeds five children for three months. And \$100 will feed ten children for three months. Think of going into Starbucks or anywhere, going to a motive, \$30 goes like that! But to think we can be the answer to a mother who is -- she looks alone. She's got nobody. She's got no family. We are her family. We are the body of Christ on this planet and we can do something but we have to do it now.

South Sudan is in crisis so let's do something about it. Would you please? I don't care if you're 15 or 85, whatever you can spare, would you dial that number on your screen? Would you go online? Would you give the best gift possible? Skip something. Skip a pedicure. Skip anything and that would feed -- if you did that for \$30 that would feed three children for three months.

Every one of us can do something so I'm asking you in Jesus' name. Jesus said, "I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat." But then he turned to the right and said, "I was hungry and you fed me." You said, "Lord, when did we do that?" "Whenever you did it to the least of these, you did it for me."

Please would you call now? 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.

Through *LIFE's* mission feeding outreach you can save lives by feeding and caring for children currently suffering from starvation in parts of Angola, Mozambique and South Sudan.

With previous reserves gone and mission feeding helping in areas of great famine, we urgently need your support to replenish food supplies to reach the 400,000 children who are counting on us. Your life saving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 will help feed and care for three, five or ten children.

With your gift we'll send you *The James Code* by O.S. Hawkins, an outstanding devotional to help you go from knowing about God to living for God, and putting your faith into action. You will also enjoy this beautifully grafted leather bookmark.

With your gift of \$100 or more please request *The Passion* translation Bible. This New Testament edition including Psalms and Proverbs ignites *The Passion* of the Bible to modern readers by merging *The Passion* of God's heart for his children with the life-changing truth of his word.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request our commemorative bronze sculpture, "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms."

Please call write or make your gift online today.

End of clip**On the mission field**

Isak: I so clearly remember when I first came to South Sudan many, many years ago. I

remember walking through some of the villages here, a lot like this village I'm in today, just being shocked -- shocked by the fact that there could be a place on earth where mothers bury their children every month, every week, some places like this village, every day.

That's why I just come to you today as I talk about what we saw then and what we see now. The fact that over these years we've been able to save so many millions of lives. We've had such a huge impact here in South Sudan. And yet, today we come into a village that we've just started working in and we talk to mothers, mother after mother who tell us their devastating stories.

Please! We have to continue what we're doing in this village and we have to reach the villages next door to here that we're not getting to yet, where children are literally starving to death. This is a crisis and it is a crisis that only we can solve because we are here. And with the gifts of friends for LIFE we can bring life to these villagers.

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much. Thank you for the way that you respond over and over again. Let's do it one more time.

For any gift at all we'll send you *The James Code* by my really good friend O.S. Hawkins. It is fantastic! And if you're able to give \$100 this beautiful edition of *The Passion Bible*. If God's blessed you, you can give \$1,000, we have a stunning bronze to send you.

But I love the fact that if you do your part and I do my part and we all do it together, whenever my son sees our mission feeding stuff he immediately wants to be part of it. If every single one of us does our part then we'll be able to make sure that we feed 400,000 children in Africa this year alone.

So I'm Sheila Walsh. Thank you so much for joining me today on *LIFE Today*. Until the next time, may God bless you with his grace.