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Week 27: Summer WFL

Sheila Walsh

"The Reality of Heartbreak"

Sheila: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm so glad that you join me. I was putting a question out on Facebook the other night and I asked, "What are the things that would make you either want to pray or would hold you back from praying?" And within like 30 minutes I had like 500 different comments. And if you're one of them, thank you. I read every single one. And I have to tell you that for several of them, I paused and prayed for you because some of you are going through some really tough things right now.

The word *heartbroken* is a word that we use a lot in our culture but sometimes I think we overuse it. We often associate it with like Hallmark movies and daytime television but at its very root the definition of heartbreak actually addresses the kind of unimaginable loss, the kind that is hard to even put into words. The Miriam Webster, original way-back dictionary, defines heartbreak this way: Overcome by sorrow. But I just want you to know the Bible is brutally honest about the reality of heartbreak.

Think of a scripture like this. This is Job who said, "My heart is troubled and restless. Days of suffering torment me. I walk in gloom without sunlight. I stand in the public square and cry for help."

Can you imagine what that must be like? Feeling as if life is going on all around you and you're crying out for help but nobody seems to notice you.

Or the Psalmist David. He cried out, "O God my rock!" I cry, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I wander around in grief oppressed by my enemies?" Their taunts break

my bones. And they scoff, "Where is this God of yours?"

There is a quote I read the other night from an author I like called Gabriel Garcia Marquez. He said this when he was writing about heartbreak: "Perhaps this is what the stories meant when they called someone heartsick. Your heart and your stomach and your whole insides felt empty and hollow and aching."

So as I was getting ready for today's show I found myself praying for you. I had no idea that you would tune in but God did. And I found myself asking the Lord, have they ever felt like that? Let me ask you that. Have you ever felt in that place where you just feel so physically heartbroken that it makes you actually almost physically sick? I know that I have been there and I want us to look at a woman who experienced tremendous sorrow in scripture. It is not disguised. But she found hope, actually by surrendering her deepest heartbreak to God.

In the Old Testament you'll probably know this, for a woman the inability to have children was looked on as not just something that was unfortunate, it was looked on as almost a curse from God. Now many of you have written and you've said what a primal heartache it is if you've tried to have a child and you can't. That's why when I looked at Hannah's story in First Samuel, when we're first introduced to her this is how she is described. It says: Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children but Hannah did not.

I mean that's how they described her to her whole community. That is a -- I have a friend at the moment who has just experienced her fourth miscarriage. It's devastating. And even though it is a devastating reality in our time but in Hannah's time it totally defined a woman, whether you could have children or not, and barrenness, as I said, was seen as a curse and a sign of God's displeasure.

Not only that, there would be a huge -- I mean huge family pressure to produce a son because you would want an heir to carry on the family name. Well Elkanah, the husband

was the fifth generation of a very strong family and they were counting on Hannah to deliver the sixth son. Carrying on the family name was so crucial in those days that Moses had introduced what was known as Levirate law. Now if you want to read all about it, you can read about it in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. But basically this is what it said. The law stated that if a man died and had produced no heir his brother had to marry his sister-in-law and produce a son who would preserve the dead brother's name.

So with no male heir a woman in those days had little worth. Every time she would be at a family gathering or walking in the market that was what she wore. She wore the badge of childlessness like a neon sign around her neck. The one thing that she longed to give her husband she couldn't.

But for Hannah, not only that, somebody else did. Peninnah, Elkanah's other wife, could have children and she did. Now I'll warn you upfront before we look at her you're probably not going to like her very much. We read in First Samuel that Hannah lived in evil days where most people gave little thought to the laws that God had given to Moses for the children of Israel. Polygamy, having more than one wife, had become acceptable. And as we read Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. It's likely that Hannah was the first wife but after years of producing no heir Elkanah married again and his new wife was able to give birth to many children, boys and girls. But she was also a very cruel woman. Rather than comforting and supporting Hannah, Peninnah simply added to Hannah's pain, and harassment went on for years.

This is what we read: So Peninnah would taunt Hannah and make fun of her because the Lord had kept her from having children. Year after year it was the same. Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the tabernacle. Each time Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat.

Sometimes we as women can be so hard on one another, where you would think we would want to step in the gap and be there for each other. But instead, what this woman did was really rub salt in a very open wound. How cruel! Can you imagine what that must

have felt like? Rather than share her children with Hannah and try to ease her burden she used the very gifts of God to add to Hannah's pain.

In addition this custom of appearing before the Lord was most likely the Feast of Booths, three times a year at the central sanctuary commemorated God's care for his people during the wilderness journey to Canaan and celebrated with joy and feasting. It was one of those feasts where it was very joyful. It was talking about God's blessings, his mercies, his miracles.

Well, Hannah was faced with remorse and loss every single year. The Lord had "closed her womb." Heartache comes in many different forms. For you it might be maybe the loss of a marriage. Or the reality that time is ticking on and there is no Prince Charming in the wings. It might even be your own health or the child you raised in the church now wants nothing to do with God. That is so hard! The unpacking of heartache is different for everyone but at some point in our lives it is delivered to every single one of our doors.

What I find challenging and beautiful about Hannah's life is that even though her heart was broken, although she must have felt she had failed as a woman and as a wife despite the relentless taunting of another, her faith in God remained intact. So you might ask, what was Hannah's secret? Well, Hannah's secret was very simple and profound. She knew where to take her pain.

We read this: Hannah was in deep anguish crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. And she made this vow, "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime."

I'm sure this was not the first time that Hannah had prayed this prayer. I'm sure she poured her soul out to God for years and years but this is the amazing thing about Hannah, even when God seemed silent she continued to take her heartache to him.

Let's just pause for a minute and look at your life. I don't know right now what you are facing but just from reading those few comments last evening on my Facebook page, some of you are facing heartache that has gone on for a long, long time. But my question would be as we look at our sister Hannah -- it's amazing to think one day we'll get to meet her!

But as we look at the example of her life, are you able to do that? Are you able to take that pain to God? See the hard thing is we think on one hand well, but God could take the pain away. He could answer the prayer. But are you still willing to take that pain and that prayer to him? Because as we'll see in Hannah's story she -- something I say often but I'll say it again. We can know the master and we don't always know the master plan. I would just say that to you. Trust the master that he cares about you.

Well, as you read Hannah's prayer it might appear, on first read it looks like she is trying to make a deal with God. You know, I'll do this if you'll do that. But I don't think that at all. I think Hannah was making a very holy vow. She had come to a place inside of her soul and spirit where she was ready to surrender what mattered most to her in life, and in that very place, before her prayer was answered, Hannah found strength and peace.

So imagine, you, taking your biggest heartache, your most treasured dream and surrendering it to your heavenly Father. Well, Eli who was the priest, you might remember, Eli saw Hannah praying but at first he misunderstood what she was doing. She was praying with such desperation that although her lips moved there was no sound coming out of her mouth. So Eli thought she was drunk. Some commentators that I've read see that as a sign of Eli's godliness. That he rebuked what appeared to be inappropriate behavior in the temple.

I don't see it that way at all. I see it much more as a sign of the times they were living in. It probably had been quite some time since Eli had seen anyone pray with passion. I mean, poor Hannah! Even in the house of God she found no comfort -- from the very one who was supposed to be her link to her heavenly Father.

Well, to Eli's credit, when he understood his mistake he gave her his blessing. This is what he said: "In that case," Eli said, "go on in peace. May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him."

And with that Hannah returned home and she became pregnant with a boy. She called him Samuel, which means name of God or offspring of God. Well, when he was about three or four years old Hannah fulfilled her vow to God and brought her son Samuel to Eli to serve God for the rest of his life.

Think about this. All Hannah had ever wanted was a son and now she had this beautiful boy. Imagine for a moment how she must have felt. She had been granted her heart's desire for a son and then knowing that the vow she had made to God had to be kept. But here's what I didn't know until I studied it a little bit further. Do you know that Hannah legally had a way to get out of her vow? All she needed to do was to ask her husband, who adored her, to refuse to accept the vow she made and she was literally home free. There was provision in the law. She was not simply home free, she was forgiven by God for even making the vow. It was part of the law given to Moses to help govern the people.

This is what it said: If her husband learns of her vow or pledge and does not object on the day he hears of it, her vows and pledges will stand. But if her husband refuses to accept her vow or impulsive pledge on the day he hears of it, he nullifies her commitments and the Lord will forgive her.

So Hannah didn't have to do this. Hannah could simply have gone to her husband and said, "Hey, I made this vow to God four years ago, five years ago but please will you renounce this vow?" But instead Hannah chose to honor her vow to God. To honor God with the request that he had granted her.

I think the mystery here is what Hannah had discovered was the joy of surrendering to a loving God even in her deepest heartache. She said this, "I asked the Lord to give me this

boy and he has granted me my request. Now I'm giving him to the Lord and he will belong to the Lord his whole life." And they worshipped the Lord there.

And then there's this beautiful -- it is a bit like, when I read it I always think it is a bit like Mary Magdalene, you know that Magnificat. This is what Hannah prayed: "My heart rejoices in the Lord. The Lord has made me strong. Now I have an answer for my enemies. I rejoice because you rescued me."

I don't know what your heartache is. I don't know what you long for but would you be willing to surrender that to the Lord? See sometimes we have this wrong idea of who God is. Like he is just waiting up there in the sky to destroy all the plans that you have or taking delight in taking things away from you and that is not our God. If you ever want like a really clear picture of who our Father is, you simply have to take a look at the cross of Jesus Christ. See God did not want eternity without you. Not just those in your Bible study that you think are the holier ones. He wanted you there. He wanted a relationship with you. So he was willing to surrender his most precious, precious thing in the world, his own son, so that you and I can have a relationship with him.

I just ask you to let God into your heartache. So often when we are hurting, the temptation is to close the door. Maybe you're tempted to even just think, I'm not going to go to church anymore. But there is something about being able to worship in the midst of our pain that brings so much glory to God.

I've been a Christian since I was 11 years of age and I'm now 62. That's 51 years of the faithfulness of God; 51 years of being able to take my heartache to him -- broken dreams. Sometimes I've discovered what I really wanted. It wasn't so much that I wanted that thing, what I really wanted was more of him. If that's your prayer today then I know God will answer that.

There's a lot of moms like me around the world and their prayer is actually a very simple one. It's a prayer that actually you and I could help answer. Would you watch this?

On the mission field:

Sheila: This water is filthy! I noticed the mom, she kind of tried to like clear it as if somehow that would get rid of the germs or get rid of the disease. But look at what she's pouring in here.

Open Captions: 421,000 worldwide deaths a year are due to unsafe drinking water.

Sheila: Some of the children that we met already in the village, they have brothers and sisters who died because after drinking this water they got diarrhea and they have no resistance. So they get even a little bit sick and they die. I mean, within two or three days they die. I can't imagine. I can't imagine as a mom that that's all that I've got to offer my daughters.

Open Captions: 800 children die each day from diseases caused by contaminated water.

Rick: Look at this! Look at what is in this water. That is just awful. And it is not just soil. This is where the cholera came from.

Jeanne: I can see things in there.

Rick: You can see tiny little worms in there. It is unbelievable!

Open Captions: 95,000 deaths around the world each year are due to cholera.

Sheila: Water for LIFE literally means that. When we put up a well in a village, we give life to the whole village for their whole life. And the need is urgent and the need is now. Will you please stand with us? Will you help us to give life to children who otherwise are drinking this and dying? Water for LIFE -- it will change their lives forever.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: I found it almost mind-blowing when I met some of these children and I walked with their moms to think, these children have never in their lives tasted clean water. Can you imagine what that would be like if you know that your children are so thirsty? Because in so many of the nations where we work, we're putting wells into 15 different nations. They go through the most unbearable heat. So children are thirsty and that's all they have to give them.

It was interesting, that very day that you just saw, when the mom and the girls got out, I looked slightly further down the stream and there's animals in it! I mean the water is absolutely filthy!

So it is our commitment here this year at *LIFE*, we want to build 400 new wells in 15 nations. Now that can seem overwhelming but it is not. We've broken it down to make it possible for you and me, for each one of us to do something. If you're able to commit \$48 then that will give clean water for ten people for their life! What else could you do that would have that kind of impact for \$48. If you're able to give \$144 that will give 30 people clean Water for LIFE. Now some of you, God has really blessed you and maybe you have your own business and God has honored your business and we celebrate with you. But one of the things we'd love to ask you to do, would you consider putting in a whole well? If you could do that its \$4800.

These wells are amazing! They will last for our 70 years. They're steel-encased so that the land is not going to go in. They will last for a long time. Do you know that that one well will provide water for 1,000 people? What else can you do in this world that will have such an impact?

I know that there's probably need all around you. We see it here in our own nation but we

have our partners that are on the ground there in these 15 nations and they're just waiting -- they're waiting for James to pick up the phone and say, "Guys, we're coming! We've got the money. A well is going in your village."

Please help us! If we all do something. So please go to your phone, go online -- just give the best gift possible. Water for LIFE, I love that phrase because it literally means that. Comes from us here at *LIFE* but it gives life to the families in the village and it will last for a lifetime.

So please, would you just give the best gift you can? \$48, ten people water for their whole lifetime. Would you call? Would you do it now? 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 else can she 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 400 water wells this year. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five children. A gift of \$48 will help provide for ten. \$72 will provided for 15. And \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime!

With your gift, we'll send you the "New Mercies Each Day" desk calendar. This 17-month calendar will not only help you keep track of important dates but also remind you of the Father's love and goodness with scripture quotes and encouragement from all

the hosts on *LIFE Today*.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "Fruit of the Spirit" bowl. This beautiful and decorative ceramic bowl features scripture revealing the "Fruit of the Spirit," a lovely addition to your table or home.

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 our "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms" bronze sculpture.

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

On the mission field:

Ralph: I'm kneeling here in the land of Cambodia. I just heard a story this morning about a little boy named Pana. Pana drank contaminated water in this village and it killed him. When I heard Pana's story what struck me was he has six surviving siblings who now know firsthand that the water they drink every day could be their last cup of water. The water that's supposed to give life could actually kill them.

I travel all over this globe and I hear stories over and over of children who drink contaminated water and it literally kills them instead of giving them life. We drill wells all over the world not just here in Cambodia, all over the world we need clean water in several different villages.

We need your help. So please today go to your phone, go online, whichever gives you the best opportunity to give a generous gift that we can bring fresh clean water all over the world this year. Give that gift today so that we can tell families, "The water that you're

drinking is not there to take your life, it is there to give you life."

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: Thank you so much. Don't you see what a difference we can make? Now for any gift at all we're going to send you these "New Mercies Each Day" calendar. It is a 17-month desk calendar with different motivational quotes and inspirational quotes from all the staff here, all the kind of hosts here at *LIFE*. But if you can give \$100 we're going to send you this beautiful "Fruit of the Spirit" bowl. I love it because you can keep your fruit in it and then as you take a piece out you can remember to pray for those families.

But if the lines were busy, and I hope they were, please call back. Write the number down and make a determination that we're going to give Water for LIFE to some people who really need it. So, from all of us here at *LIFE Outreach* and *LIFE Today*, we love you so much. We'll see you next time. God bless you!