

12/4/19

Week 49: Fall Mission Feeding

Sheila Walsh

"Faith That Prays"

Sheila: I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm so glad that you've stopped, and I pray you'll pause and stay with us. Because I think there is something going on in our culture at the moment that is really distressing. I don't know if you're a big social media person. I do some social media, I try not to do too much, but it seems as if we're very polarized as a nation and that people are really angry.

But sometimes I think, at the root of anger is actually pain. Sometimes anger is more comfortable because it makes us feel as if we're in control even though we're not, but pain can be hard to acknowledge because we feel out of control. The word *heartbroken* is definitely an overused word in our culture. But if you go to the very roots, the definition of pain, of heartache speaks to really unimaginable loss.

I was looking up in the Miriam Webster dictionary and it defines heartbreak this way: Overcome by sorrow. I want you to know, if you think, does God know, does he get what I'm going through right now? The Bible is brutally honest about the reality of heartbreak.

Here's just a couple of verses: 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. That's from Job, a man who was a blameless man but still experienced outrageous heartache.

Here's another one from the Psalmist David: 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. They scoff, "Where is this God of yours?"

It is interesting that the Psalmist David said, "Their taunts break my bones"? We have that saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." That is so not true. Words are powerful and they can really cut to the core.

I was reading a book by an author called Gabriel Garcia Marquez and there was a quote in there that made me think, yeah, I think that ties in with what I'm talking about. This is what he said. He said, "Perhaps this is what the stories meant when they called somebody heartsick. Your heart and your stomach and your whole insides felt empty and hollow and aching."

Maybe you feel like that right now. I know I've been there. But today I want us to look at a woman who experienced tremendous sorrow, but she found hope by surrendering her deepest heartbreak to God. This is something that I really believe in: Process your pain in the presence of God. Process your pain, process your emotions, process your heartache, process your doubts in the presence of God.

So then look at Hannah. And for a woman, the inability to have children has to be one of the most profound primal heartaches there is. Hannah's story is found in First Samuel. When we're first introduced to her this is how she is introduced, how she is described.

First Samuel one, verse two says this, "Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not."

That's how she was known to the whole community. That's a devastating reality in our time but in Hannah's time, it totally defined a woman. Barrenness was seen as a curse and a sign of God's displeasure. But not only that but there would be huge family pressure to produce a son, an heir to carry on the family name.

Elkanah 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. If you want to study that you can find it in Deuteronomy Chapter 25. But this 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, which would preserve the dead brother's name.

Now 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, she wore the badge of childlessness like a neon sign around her neck. The only thing that she longs to give her husband she couldn't. Not only that but someone else, Peninnah, Elkanah's other wife, could and did.

Now just going to warn you upfront, you're probably not going to like her. 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. As we read Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. It is likely that Hannah was the first wife but after years of producing no heir Elkanah married again. 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 the harassment went on for years.

Listen to 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 happen any as they went to the Tabernacle. Each time, Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat.

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 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 God's blessings and mercies.

But Hannah arrived every time faced with remorse and loss and the cruelty of another woman. The Lord had closed her womb. Heartache comes in many forms. For you, it might be the loss of a marriage. I met a woman just a couple weeks ago who said to me, "I've been married for 32 years and last week my husband said, 'I don't think I've ever loved you' and he left." Can you imagine the heartache? The hollowness?

Or perhaps you've been longing to be married and time is ticking on and there is no Prince Charming in the wings. Or it might be your health. Or what I think is one of the most painful wounds to carry, a child you raised in church now wants nothing to do with God. The unpacking of heartache is different for every one of us but at some point in our lives it is delivered to every one of our doors.

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

Because we read 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..."

Now this was not the first time Hannah had prayed this prayer. I'm sure she poured her soul out to God for years and years. And even when heaven seemed silent, she continued to take her heartache to her Father.

As you read her prayer it might appear as if Hannah is trying to make "a deal" with God.

I don't think she was trying to make a deal with God. She was making a solemn vow. She had come to a place inside of her soul and her spirit where she was ready to surrender what mattered most in life and in that place, Hannah found strength and peace.

See, the thing is when we process our pain in the presence of God, it doesn't always change our circumstances, but it changes us. Imagine right now taking your biggest heartache, your most treasured dream and by an act of faith surrendering it to your heavenly Father.

Well, Eli the priest saw Hannah praying but at first, he misunderstood what she was doing. She was praying with such desperation that though her lips moved there was no sound coming out of her mouth. So get this, Eli thought she was drunk. I read where some commentators 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 more as a sign of the times they were living in. Probably been quite some time since Eli had seen anyone pray with passion.

Poor Hannah! Even in the house of God she found no comfort from the very one who is supposed to be her link to her heavenly Father. But give him credit. When Eli understood his mistake, he gave her his blessing. "In that case," Eli said, "Go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request that you have asked of him."

And with that, Hannah returned home and became pregnant with a boy. She called him Samuel which means name of God or offspring of God or asked of God.

Now 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. Now all Hannah had ever wanted was a son and now she had this beautiful boy. Imagine for a moment how she may have felt being granted her heart's desire for a son and then knowing that the vow she'd made to God had to be kept.

But you know what's interesting? Because maybe you think well, she's trapped now. She's told God she'll do this, and she has to. But that's not so. Interestingly, 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 home free. That was written into Moses law. Not only home free but forgiven by God. Part of the law given to Moses to help govern the people said this: 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 commitment, and the Lord will forgive her.

So Hannah didn't have to do this. But Hannah chose to honor her vow to God, to honor God with the request he had granted her. I think what Hannah had discovered was the joy of surrender even in her deepest heartache. This is what she said, "I asked the Lord to give me this boy and he has granted 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 Hannah prayed. It is more of a song of praise. "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, what you long for, but I'm wondering if you would be able to surrender it to the Lord. What I find fascinating when I study Hannah's story and when I ask the Holy Spirit to help me understand was this is what a woman who prays in faith looks like.

So often when we pray, we start where we are. I'm trying to think of something that might be really important to you. Perhaps you're looking for a new job or perhaps you're longing for a child. Perhaps you're longing for a spouse or perhaps you've been diagnosed with an illness and you're longing for healing. What I wonder is would you be able to process everything you're feeling but in the presence of God?

One of the things that I struggle with, and you might find this hard to believe because I do work in television, but I always struggle with photo shoots. There is something -- I mean I love television because I feel like it is just you and me and we're just together here with the Lord. I love all our mission outreaches. I mean I love going to Angola in a tent in the middle of nowhere under God's starry, starry skies. I can stand up and speak to 25,000 women and think, this is such a privilege. But tell me I have to do a photo shoot and it's like no! I have a new book coming out next year called *Praying Women* and every time that I have a photo shoot scheduled, right back from the days when I used to record albums, (Yes, they were albums back then) I would always have this vow. Okay, I have got this photo shoot coming up in six weeks. I'm going to lose ten pounds. And every single time I gain about five. I don't know why. It's like I sabotage myself.

So with this latest photo shoot we were shooting it in this barn in Texas. It's this beautiful big old white barn that they use for weddings. And I arrived a little bit early and Barry, my husband had brought a single white chair in and he just sat it in the middle of this -- it was almost like a big white cathedral. And he sat the chair there and then he went back to the car to make a phone call and get some things. So I was the only one there.

I'm looking at this single chair in the middle of this vast space and sunlight coming through the windows. And as I stood there -- now I've never heard the audible voice of God, but I heard in my spirit the Lord say, "Why don't you come and sit a while?" And so I just made my way and I just sat in that chair in the presence of God.

I have to tell you, the peace that came over me because if you're like me, there's a million and one things going on in life and so often all our insecurities come to the surface. But I really encourage you, find some time today, tomorrow, every day just find a chair somewhere or put it in the middle of your room and just sit in the presence of the Lord.

There is something beautiful about -- for me that morning, it was like, well, Lord. Here I am again. Doing the same old thing again. And then being reminded, you know what? It does not matter. That stuff doesn't matter at all. What matters is that right now no matter

what is going on in your life, you are fully, completely, totally seen and loved by God. And he's listening.

There is something so calming to our spirits when we just shut off the noise for a while. Maybe you get up in the morning and your first instinct is to turn on the television. It might be good to start a few new habits of just having some quiet in the morning. Not just to be able to raise our requests to the Lord but just to sit in his presence. And if you are facing some heartache at the moment, I would remind you of the change that took place in Hannah's life because even if her husband tried to understand... it is interesting because First Samuel one, verse eight, I kind of call it a "bless your heart" verse because he says, Elkanah says to his wife, "Why are you crying? Why won't you eat? You know you've got me! Isn't that better than eight sons or ten sons," I think he said. And it sounded like bless your heart.

But even though perhaps her husband didn't understand the weight of the pain she carried, even though this other woman in her life tormented her, and perhaps you have people like that in your life, who make what you're suffering, what you're going through so much worse, what Hannah did is she took her pain, she stepped away from everything else and she took her pain into the presence of God. And what happened was she was changed from the inside out.

It's a great practice to start. Process your life, your pain, your emotions in the presence of the one who loves you most. And sometimes just in that quiet place your eyes begin to turn from yourself and your eyes begin to look outward to a world that is hurting. And then you see, you know what? There is something I can do about this. Would you watch this?

On the mission field:

Announcer: If you've ever missed a meal or two, you probably know the feeling of hunger pains and the relief that your next meal brings. But sadly, there are those who live

with the pain of hunger every single day of their life.

And then there are children who do not survive once they beyond the pain of hunger. Veronica is reminded of her little brother dying from the lack of food every day that she has to go without food.

Interpreter: I remember when my brother died. We were hungry and he was so thin. My mom took him to a clinic that was very far away, and he died on the way there.

Announcer: Veronica's story is all too common in villages throughout Southern Africa and that's what makes this so urgent that we do something now.

Sheila: Some of these moms had to walk 10 or 15 kilometers with a seriously malnourished baby just to try and get some help. And if they can get here in time, then there is some hope. But time is everything here as you can see. But my prayer is that we can save hundreds of other children before they get to this stage. No child should ever get to this stage. No mom should ever have to watch this. So if we do something now, we can stop this from happening.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: I cannot tell you what it's like walking into a malnutrition clinic. It's like, I get on a plane in Dallas, Texas and within a few hours, maybe a day, I'm in another world. I've gone from an airport where there is 101 fast food restaurants and people tossing food that they don't want, to a place where there is nothing!

Can you imagine as a mom having your child die before your very eyes, in your arms, simply because you couldn't provide anything for them to eat? And some of you have written and asked me questions about well, why don't they have anything? Don't they work? Isn't there a way to...?

If drought happens in Africa, if there is no rain, the crops fail. I have watched, I have walked with these women as they literally, with their fingernails, scratched through the earth trying to find anything -- anything that they could give to their children.

And the sight of these precious little ones whose hair has turned red through lack of good nutrition, who have that little distended belly, with stick thin arms and legs, it's heartbreaking.

The thing I want you to understand is that little child, the one that was wrapped in that blanket is every bit as important to God as my son or your daughter. God cares for us all. So why on earth are we over fed? And these ones have nothing? This is our -- it is not just even our duty, this is our privilege.

That's why I love mission feeding. I'd heard about it for years. I'd contributed for years but when I got to first step on the ground in Africa and see the difference between a malnutrition clinic and where mission feeding has been set up, it changed my life forever. I'll never be the same.

So I'm asking you to help us. And you can do it for very little. \$30 will feed three children for three months. \$30! That's like two movie tickets. Feeding three children for three months. \$50 will feed five children. \$100 feeds ten. \$1,000 feeds 100 children for three months. Would you help us?

For any gift at all we're going to send you this phenomenal CD by Anthony Evans. It's called *Altared*. Just as Hannah was altered in the presence of God, this CD reflects how he's been *Altared* in worship.

So please, would you go to your phone? Would you make the very best gift possible? Let's empty those malnutrition clinics in Jesus' name.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Mission feeding began with a promise to be there in times of crisis for thousands of hurting and hungry children in their time of need.

Now more than ever we need your help to save lives by feeding and caring for children across the continent of Africa. With food reserves gone and many areas experiencing severe famine, we urgently need to replenish our supplies to reach the 400,000 children who are counting on us. Your gift of love can be the miracle answer to a desperate mother's prayer.

Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50 or \$100 that will help feed and care for three, five or ten children for three full months. With your gift, we'll send you the authored worship CD by Anthony Evans. This powerful full-length album includes unique versions of some of today's most cherished worship songs that are sure to uplift and inspire you.

With your gift of \$100 or more please request the "Filled with Faith" and "...Joy" travel mug set. These 12-ounce mugs are crafted with large handles, double-layered insulation and vacuum sealed lids to prevent spills. Each mug includes a message to remind you of God's blessings and faithfulness.

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 video**On the mission field**

Isak: I've always said that to me the greatest tragedy that could ever happen to any

human being is to bury your own children. And yet for this mother and many others in her village that is a reality year after year after year. Please! Do what you can do. Be a part of helping a mother like this to ensure that she doesn't bury the last of her two children that are left.

You say, "Well, what can I do? How do I change that? My heart's broken too. But what do I do about changing this mother's? How can I change this?"

You can bring Mission Feeding to this village. You can bring life to this village if you will just get up right now, dial the number that's on your screen, and just give the best gift that you can give. Give the gift of love and the gift of life. Give Mission Feeding to this mother and her children and her entire village.

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: Thank you so much! I know some of you have given and given before. Let's give again. Let's never stop giving until Jesus takes us home.

As I said, for any gift at all we'll send you Anthony Evans CD called *Altared*. What a voice that guy has! It is phenomenal! For \$100 or more we'll send you these great travel mugs "Filled with Faith" and "Filled with Joy." So if you wake up some morning and you need a little bit more faith, take that one. If you need a little more joy, put your coffee in that one. But let's do all of this in the name of Jesus. What a witness to the world if suddenly the children in Africa were all being fed because the body of Christ rose up and said, "Not on our watch!"

Remember, we're always here for you. We have a prayer center. If you need people to pray for you, just know that we take that very seriously. So for James and Betty, I'm Sheila Walsh saying thank you so much. And we'll see you next time on *LIFE Today*!