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Week 7: WFL

Sheila Walsh

*Praying Women #3*

**Sheila:** Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I don't know if you've ever experienced this. When you feel as if you're praying and praying and nothing seems to be changing. It's not as if you're praying for something that's trivial but something that really matters. But it doesn't seem as if you're breaking through and you really need to hear from God.

Well, I experienced something like that before my son was born. I actually didn't meet my husband Barry until I was 37. We were married on a beautiful snowy day in December in Charleston, South Carolina. I don't know if you've ever been there but it's so lovely. Well, once we were married, because I was a little older, we took the business of getting pregnant very seriously. But as happens to many women, each passing month was another disappointment.

After a whole year, I actually went to my doctor to see if conceiving was even possible for me. She was very positive. She was a very loving person and encouraging. Her nurse was less so. What she actually said to me, I think was, "Oh well, all your eggs will be hard boiled by now." Lovely!

Well, for the first time in my life I found myself really longing for a child. Every time I passed a mom in the mall or in the grocery store with her little ones it just felt like a fresh stab to my heart. These women belonged to a community that I might never be invited into. I remember praying every night and just begging God to give us a child.

And then, it happened. When I saw the positive sign on the pregnancy test, I dropped it and it lay wrong way up on the bathroom floor and I was afraid to pick it up in case I'd read it wrong. So I drove to the drugstore and I bought another one. And again it said I was pregnant. But I still wasn't absolutely sure because I thought, I ate a lot of carbs last night. I don't know if that could affect it. So I drove back, and I bought another one. And the girl at the cash register said to me, "Accept it, honey! You're pregnant."

She was right! Well, I didn't know just how to tell Barry. I felt like I should probably have a parade and a brass band and balloons. But as he was due home in 40 minutes, I had to scrap those ideas. Instead, the moment he walked in I yelled, "We're pregnant!"

The first few weeks of my pregnancy were a blur of absolute joy. And at our first sonogram we learned that the baby was a boy. We were so so happy! But then one phone call interrupted our happiness. Have you ever been there? Just out of the blue? I would be 40 years old when the baby was born and my doctor had asked for additional tests, one being an amniocentesis. And when the results came back, she asked us to come into her office. We sat down on one side of her desk as she sat on the other with a brown folder in front of her. I don't remember everything she said but I remember -- I remember this. She said something that I'd never even heard before in my life. She said, "I'm so sorry to tell you but your baby is incompatible with life." I stared at her as if she was speaking in a foreign language. That was a phrase I'd never heard anyone use before.

Neither Barry nor I said anything. We were stunned. I could see her mouth was still moving but I felt as if I had a glass dome over my head and I couldn't even hear her. I couldn't concentrate on what she was saying. But then she said something that she recommended, and it snapped me back. She recommended, she said, "I would like you to come in tomorrow and I would like to perform a termination."

Well, I heard that. And her words snapped me back into reality. I mean I was shocked. I said, "No! Absolutely not!" I remember saying to her, "This little one will have every

single day, every moment God has planned for him to live." I remember Barry and I just drove home in silence that day. There just didn't seem to be anything to say.

Well, I woke up early the following morning and I drove to the beach as we were living in southern California at the time and it was really early, the beach was deserted. My only companions were sea gulls. So I took off my shoes and I walked to the edge of the water and I prayed. I prayed like I had never prayed before, out loud to the wind and the waves, to the birds, and to my savior, "Jesus, my heart is aching. I don't understand this at all, but I just want to declare here and now that we are in this together. I've always needed you, but I know right now that I need you more than I ever have. I don't know how this will end but I'm not letting go of you for one moment. You didn't promise me happiness, but you did promise that you would never, never leave me. I'm not letting go, I'm not giving up. You and me, we're in this together."

Something shifted inside of me that morning. I had no idea how long I could carry our son but I became relentless in my prayers -- not for a perfect outcome but for the presence of a perfect Father. And at 35 weeks my doctor called, and I held my breath. What she told me was that the day my results had come back the results of another 40-year old patient had also come back and my results had gone into her chart and hers into mine. There had never been anything wrong with our son. I fell to my knees and I thanked God. But then I thought, there's another woman out there getting a very different phone call and I prayed for her.

I don't know what battle you are facing right now. It might be for your child, for your marriage, for your health, for your very sanity but what I want you to know is this, when we pray and pray and refuse to give up things change. If you're discouraged and I understand that, can I just simply say, in Jesus' name hold on! The enemy would love nothing more than for us to give up and to stop praying.

One of the most powerful illustrations Jesus gave us of what it looks like to pray and pray and never give up is a story of a widow who wouldn't go away. We find her story in

Luke. Luke Chapter 18, verses 1-8: One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up. "There was a judge in a certain city," he said, "who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly saying, "Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy." The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, "I don't fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!" Then the Lord said, "Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?"

This one parable unpacks so much about prayer. Imagine if you can right now you're sitting at Jesus' feet and you're wrestling with everything you're wrestling with and he takes your lovely face in his hands and lets you in on a kingdom secret telling you how to pray when you are overwhelmed and ready to quit. You may have been fighting your battles for so long and you're tempted to believe God's not listening. He doesn't care. I pray -- I pray that this passage puts those thoughts to rest. God is listening to you. He cares about you.

Look at what Jesus said. I love the way that Luke spells out clearly for us. This is what it says, "One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up."

Not a lot of mystery there. It is crystal clear. Sometimes Jesus' parables were difficult for those who were listening to understand. Not here! Jesus wants us to know that persistent, relentless prayer matters. Persistent prayer changes things. But most of all, it changes us. This kind of prayer is not an "Oh, God bless my son" prayer. This is a down on your knees, fully engaged in battle, refusing to give up until God answers kind of prayer.

Jesus made a comparison between a judge who should be willing to help a poor widow

but won't give her the time of day and God, your loving Father who is moved by the cries of his people. In this parable, the judge doesn't care about God or about standing before him one day. He is... he is the definition of a law unto himself.

Hearing that this judge not only doesn't fear God but also has no regard for people allows us to make a few assumptions about him. A man like this is open to the worst kind of corruption and bribery. If you want justice from him, you'll need to make it worth his while. So a widow with little to no status or money in that society, she had no hope. In contrast, God tells us all to come as we are with empty open hands and that he will hear our cry and answer.

You know our culture is obsessed with money and status and social media followers. We might be tempted to feel -- I don't know if you've ever felt this, that you don't have a significant voice in this world. If we're not careful though we can let this feeling spill over into our relationship with God. Perhaps you expect God to hear the prayers of your pastor or those you look up to in the faith, those with significant platforms like James and Betty, but you put yourself at the bottom of God's to-do list. That is not the truth! You're not at the bottom of God's to-do list. You are right at the top. God doesn't care whether you've written a book or spoken at a conference or anything else you might attach significance to. He waits to hear from you. He cares about you. He loves you.

Many of you have written to me about where you find yourself right at this moment. Some of you have lost income or one lady wrote to me to tell about a husband who has walked away. And one letter that broke my heart was from a woman who had gained quite a bit of weight and was still single and believed that no one would ever want to be with her because of how she looked. That's just not true.

Whatever your story is, please remember that even if every other door is slammed in your face the door into your father's presence never ever will be. Don't skip over that! We get so used to seeing encouraging phrases as memes or bumper stickers. But this is a life-changing truth. The one who holds the universe in place, who sits right now on the

eternal throne, to whom one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord, he loves you. You're not forgotten, you're not overlooked, you're seen and loved and listened to. That's why Jesus tells us not to lose heart.

In the parable Jesus makes the point that even a corrupt judge will eventually give in to this woman who refuses to quit simply because he wants to get rid of her. Every time he steps out of his front door there she is again. How much more will your Father who loves you respond to your fervent prayers?

The last verse, I don't know if you caught it when I read it the first time. The last verse in the parable about the persistent widow is very significant. It says: "But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?" That's Luke 18, verse eight.

As this is found at the end of a parable on prayer, the text indicates that when Christ returns he will equate faith with those who persisted in prayer. He'll find some of us who prayed and then quit because it just got too hard. And some who refused to quit no matter how hard it got.

The question is this. How many will he find who persisted in prayer? This parable, I'm learning, has helped me to pray and pray and pray until I feel as if God must be fed up hearing from me but I know he's not. God is not out to trick us or to harm us. Persisting in prayer no matter how hard it is or how long an answer takes, what will happen only when we believe that God is who he says he is. If we doubt his love, we're just going to hold back in prayer. But if we believe him and receive that love we will dive in with everything we have and everything we are.

There are so many stories in the Bible. In fact, when I wrote this book *Praying Women*, I spent two years of my life just pouring over scripture, looking for every reference in prayer, looking at what prayer meant to Jesus. How did he pray? How often did he pray? When did he need to get away from other people to pray? And after two years, then I just

poured it into writing this book that I would love to make available to you for any gift at all to what we are very concerned here about at this ministry.

I don't know if you're familiar with this passage in Matthew but if you've ever thought to yourself, if you've ever had the thought gosh, I wish I could do something for Jesus, but I have no idea what that would be. Let me tell you because Jesus lays it out pretty clearly. This is Matthew 25 and I'm going to read from verses 34 on, "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink.'" Let me skip down to verse 37: "Then the righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink?'"

Then Jesus said, "Whenever you did this for the least of these, you did it for me."

That is a mind-blowing truth for me. To think of understanding everything that Christ has already done for us. Think about his life: Thirty years of living, three years of ministry, one remarkable act of dying and rising again from the dead, and over 2,000 years now of praying because Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father and he's praying for us.

So that's why I wanted to talk to you today about a trip that I took just a short time ago. I have had the privilege here at *LIFE* of going on many of our mission trips because I wanted to see with my own eyes how this makes a difference. But this one last trip that I took to Africa has left a permanent mark on my heart because I found sisters there just like you and me but whose prayers perhaps are a little different tonight than yours might be.

You know when we sit around with our family for a meal we pause, and we thank God for everything he has provided but I want to show you what it looks like when you have nothing to offer your children. That's a very different situation. Would you watch this?

**On the mission field:**

**Open Captions:**

>> My name is Eness and I have six children.

[Song]

It never goes away

Always in my veins

I want to lay it all down

It's getting heavy for me now

I want to lay it all, lay it all down

Can't breathe

Can't breathe

I can't breathe

**Open Captions:**

>> One of my children got very sick and died. He had a high fever and diarrhea. I took him to the clinic and got some medicine, but he was too sick and kept vomiting the medicine. He was only nine months old.

[Song]

They want to take it from me

They want to take it from me

They want to take it from me

**Open Captions:**

>> My children still drink the dirty water that killed my baby. It is the only water source we have and the water is full of germs. I worry all the time that my other children will get sick. If we had clean water life would be good for us.



## **End of video**

### **In the studio:**

**Sheila:** Sometimes I think of what my kind of wish list is in life. You know you think, maybe in a couple of years you'll do this or maybe we'll do that. All these moms want is to be able to give their children water that won't kill them. It's this bitter irony that so many of these hand-dug wells that are near the villages, it is like what should be the source of life is the source of death.

It takes the men in the village about a week to dig a hand-dug well. But when it rains all the animal waste goes in and the water is filthy. When she pulled it up in that little container, and then went to give it to her child I had this overwhelming desire to stop her. But then I thought, what am I offering in its place? She has nothing else.

These women -- these amazing women that I met in Zambia usually get up between 4 and 4:30 in the morning because they need to get to that well, to get in line. Because it's a shallow well, it will run out of water quickly and if you don't make the morning run then you have to wait for hours.

I just can't imagine how heartbreaking that is as a mom to think this is all I've got to give them. I'm standing in line for hours and it may well kill them.

Their prayers are very simple. God please, please will you send clean water? And that's why at *LIFE Outreach* we are there. We want to put more wells in and I'm asking you -- I'm asking you in Jesus' name would you help us? We can each do something. If you're able to give \$48 that will provide clean water for ten people; \$144, clean water for 30. And perhaps some of you watching would be able to put a whole well in. Maybe you could do it as a Bible study group or a Sunday school Class; \$4800 would put in a well that will give water for 1,000 people!

And I watched when I was over there, I watched them drilling and they drilled down and down and down until what shoots out is fresh clean water that saves their lives. And for any gift at all, I'll be happy to send you my book, *Praying Women*. We also have some other gifts. We have a beautiful power of prayer bundle. We have a beautiful bronze. But what I'm asking you to do right now is please, will you go to your phone, dial that number on your screen and give the best, best gift you possibly can?

### **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 is the answer to a mother's prayer to save the lives of her children, to offer them a bright future free from the fear of death. With your gift today you can help drill and establish 350 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 people. \$72 will provide for 15. \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime.

With your gift we'll send you *Praying Women*: "How to pray when you don't know what to say." In her new book, Sheila Walsh shows you how to reignite your conversation with God to become a strong praying woman.

With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the "*Power of Prayer*" bundle. This bundle includes a cozy throw blanket adorned with words of The Lord's Prayer, a decorative pillow

cover, as well as Sheila's book. All three are encouraging reminders of how there's power in your faith-filled prayers!

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 brand-new commemorative bronze sculpture, "A Mother's Strength."

Please call, write or make your gift online!

**End of video**

**In the mission field:**

**Sheila:** This hand-dug well is full of contaminated water. It's the only source of water for this village. The mothers and their children, they come out here every day with their buckets and they gather water. And the mothers know there is a potential that this water will kill their children because there's all sorts of animal dung in here. Someone told me that snakes get in here, mosquitoes lay their eggs and so many of the children in the village have malaria. I just talked to a mom who lost her 12-year-old son because of malaria.

But this is the water that is killing these children and that is why they need a well. A drilled well that will go down deep and give fresh clean water. This should not be normal for any child! And we want to give them a new normal, in Jesus' name! Fresh, clean, safe water!

**End of video**

**In the studio:**

**Sheila:** I remember saying to that mom as we left that village that day, "I won't forget

about you! And I'm going to home to tell some people who care about you even though they've never met you. And they're going to make a difference."

Because so many of you, you've been such faithful partners through the years. And James and Betty are so grateful for your help but the need is there. It's our commitment here at *LIFE Outreach* to put 350 new water wells in villages. That sounds like a lot but not if we do it together.

So please, if you tried to call and the line was busy, keep persisting in prayer. Remember when we're persistent in our prayers, God answers. Be persistent in getting through. Or you can go online and make your gift that way. But I want to be able to go back to Zambia and to tell those darling women, "God heard your prayers and he sent some people who care about you."

So for all of us here at *LIFE Today* I'm Sheila Walsh. I'll see you next time!