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Week ten: WFL last week

Sheila Walsh

Praying Women #5

Sheila: Hi! Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh. I'm so glad that you chose to be with us today. I started writing on the subject of prayer. I spent a couple of years just researching, reading what other people had written, reading what God's word said about prayer, and then I put out kind of a survey on my Facebook page. I don't know if you do Facebook but if you do, mine is just SheilaWalshConnects.

But I put out a little survey and I said, "What do you find are some of the biggest challenges in your own life about prayer?" And there were lots of things that came up. Honestly, I addressed most of them in my book. But one of them was something that came up over and over again and it was this: How do you keep holding on and praying when heaven seems silent? Have you ever been in a place like that? I think one of the greatest challenges to life of faith and prayer is to keep praying when it feels as if your prayers go no higher than the ceiling. Or it feels as if God is just silent. I have an awesome memory as a teenager of one man's faithful prayers. He refused to stop praying even when it seemed as if heaven wasn't listening.

Growing up in our little town in Scotland, every Tuesday night I'd go with my mom to our church prayer meeting. Ours wasn't a very large church so maybe I don't know 30 or so of us met every week. But one of my favorite members was a gentle older man from way up north in the Highlands of Scotland. I'll call him Angus. Every Tuesday he prayed the same prayer. He asked God for his wife's salvation. Some nights he would pray in his soft lilting accent, and other nights he wouldn't be able to finish as tears poured down his

rough cheeks. I cannot tell you how many Tuesday nights I wept with Angus.

He'd been a pilot after he gave up his farm and had retained his pilot's license. So one summer day, I was probably about 15 or 16, he flew my brother and I up to the island off the north coast of Scotland where he'd been born. He thought we'd enjoy the flight up the coast, and he wanted to show us the little church or "Kirk" as he called it where he'd been raised.

I remember it was a beautiful clear day and I remember looking out the small plane's window as we got lower and lower over the fields of sheep and wondering, where is the landing strip? I remember saying to him, yelling over the noise of the propellers, "There is no landing strip!" He said, "Oh just watch, wee lass. We'll just have to come and let the sheep know we're coming." And sure enough, as he flew low over one of the fields the sheep ran for their lives and we landed safely.

After tea and scones at a local tea shop, we walked up a cobbled alley to the church. The doors were open so we went inside. The floors were just one of those beautiful old, old churches where the floors squeaked with stories from long ago as we walked to the front where the sun was streaming through the lone stained-glass window. It was a picture of Christ the good shepherd carrying the lost sheep back home.

We sat in the stillness for a while just enjoying the quiet. Then I said, "Do you mind if I ask you a question, Angus?" He said, "No, lass. Go ahead!" "Well, it's about your wife. Do you ever wonder why God hasn't answered your prayers yet?" He was quiet and thoughtful for a moment and then he looked at me and he said this, "He's never failed me yet, lass and I don't reckon he'll start now." Well, I found out from my mom later that night that Angus had been praying for his wife for over 40 years.

Well, years later I was home on a break from seminary when Angus died, and our little church was packed! This gentle man's life had touched so many people. Our pastor preached a beautiful message about Angus's long obedience in the same direction and his

utter devotion to Christ. At the end of the service, as those who have come to honor his life poured out onto the street, I noticed that Angus's wife was still sitting in the front row and our pastor was sitting by her side. Well, I assumed obviously he was trying to comfort her, so I slipped out and left them alone. But later that day I discovered that he'd been leading her into a relationship with Jesus. When she saw the church packed with those who loved her husband and heard this compelling message about the one who led Christ all his days, she finally bowed and Angus's savior became her savior that day too.

Let me just tell you this. A lifetime is not too long to pray. Angus wouldn't know the impact of his prayers until two years later when his wife passed and walked through those gates and joined him in heaven.

God's word is full of stories of men and women who waited for years to hear from God. Think of Abram and Sarai who became Abraham and Sarah. If you were raised in church like I was, it's easy to think you know that story but as I've been studying over and over again, it is pretty mind blowing. Think about this. When God first introduced himself to Abram, Abram was 75 years old and he was a pagan. So about 2,000 years before the birth of Christ, God told him to leave his country and that he would bless him. You can read that for yourself in Genesis 12. And all we read is, "Abram obeyed."

There's got to be more to the story than that, don't you think? I always want the longer version. Don't you wish you knew how God talked to him? It had to be quite something for him to pack up his wife and his nephew Lot and all his possessions and walk away from his home in Ur, which we now know is modern day Iraq; that's where Abram was. He was leaving behind his birth right, his inheritance to follow a God he had just literally met.

Now the land that God was promising him was 1500 miles away through Haran, which is what we know as modern day Syria, and eventually all the way to Canaan, modern day Israel. Abram didn't know how far they'd have to travel. He simply believed God and off he went. Well, hundreds of miles from home he and Sarai find themselves in a country

where, think about it, they can't speak the language, they're old, and they have no children.

Let me pause their story for a minute and ask you a question. Have you ever stepped out in faith, perhaps, those around you told you it was crazy but you believed you'd heard from God and so in faith you moved forward? You took that job -- or you quit that job. Having moved across the country and joined that church, whatever it was, and you expected that because you had stepped up that God would do... but things didn't work out quite the way you thought they would and you wonder did I get it wrong? Did I really hear from God or was my family right? God's timing is rarely on our schedule and we tend to measure our understanding of God's ways and will by the outcome that we can see. But the truth is God is far more interested in who you and I are *becoming* in the waiting.

Abram had been told all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him but ten years passed and nothing was happening. Now he's 85 years old and he still has no children. But ten years isn't such a long time if you're 20 but Abram was 75 when God first spoke to him so ten years, that was a lot. But then God spoke to him again and told him that he would have a son and his descendants would be like the stars. You can read about that in Genesis 15.

It was tradition in those days that if a wealthy man died without an heir, the head servant in his household, his right-hand man would inherit everything. But God said, "No, Abram, you will have your own son." He took Abram outside and told him to look up at the stars and count them if he could.

It's hard for you and I to imagine how spectacular that would have looked. Well, I got a glimpse of it in Africa. When we're in the middle of a country in Africa and there's no electricity, there's no light from cars or houses, and often our photographer Janice will take these amazing photographs. We'll just kind of lay there and look at the stars. It's breathtaking! So that's what Abram saw.

So God spoke to Abram revealing his plans for his life. But what about Sarai? Where was she in all this? God's message to Abram was pretty straight forward, "You will have a son of your own." But God didn't speak to Sarai. He didn't include her name in his promise to Abram, and now Abram's 85 and she's 75 years old. So like we often do, she came up with her own plan. It's human nature. When we can't see how God could possibly work things out often we're tempted to improvise. I feel for Sarai. Her plan B was to have Abram sleep with her maid, but it would ultimately, deeply hurt her. It would hurt her maid, Hagar and it would give birth to two nations that are still to this day at war, Palestine and Israel.

My heart aches for you, too if you've found yourself in a place like that where you've been waiting and waiting, and God is doing nothing -- at least nothing you can see. You wanted to be married and believed that God had promised you a husband or a wife but time kept marching on and that infernal clock kept ticking, if you're a woman. So you reached out for what was there and now you wonder if you've just made the biggest mistake of your life. Or maybe you knew that God had prepared you for this new position, but he passed over you again. So you said, "Forget it" and left, and now you feel adrift, like you don't belong anywhere.

When we fill God's silence with plans of our own that don't work out, it's easy to feel as if we've blown it and there is no way back. I want you to know that is not true. God is a redeemer and it's not over yet. I want you to hear that. God's plan for your life, it is not over yet.

Well, 13 years have passed since Hagar's son, Ishmael's birth. That's a long time for Sarai to hear that boy's laughter, watch him run into his mother's arms, watch her husband hold his son with pride, 13 years of regret. And she must have felt as if this was all her life was going to hold for her. Why did I do this? Why did I suggest that Abram sleep with my maid? She must have asked that question to herself over and over a thousand times but it was done! There was nothing she could do about it -- but God could. It just took every

one of those 13 years.

After 13 years of silence, God spoke to Abram again. He's now 99. "When Abram was 99 years old," we read, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am El Shaddai -- God Almighty. Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. This is my covenant with you. I will make you the father of a multitude of nations! What's more, I'm changing your name. It will no longer be Abram. Instead, you will be called Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations.'"

From his Chaldean heritage, his name Abram meant "exalted father." Now he was given a new name, Abraham, a Hebrew term, "father of many." But what about Sarai? Did God see her? Had she blown it because she came up with her own plan? No! Now God spoke about her by name and changed her name in a little but hugely significant way.

Then God said to Abraham, "Regarding Sarai your wife -- her name will no longer be Sarai. From now on her name will be Sarah. And I will bless her and give you a son from her! Yes, I will bless her richly and she will become the mother of many nations. Kings of nations will be among her descendants."

Sarai meant "my princess" in the land he'd come from but now God's changed it to Sarah, "princess," a Hebrew name in the land where kings would be among her descendants. No longer simply Abram's princess but one in her own right under God. This was a very unusual thing for God to do. Those kind of generational blessings from God fell on the man of the house but God gifted Sarah with the name, "mother of many nations."

Don't let anyone ever tell you that God's word is misogynistic, that God doesn't love and honor women. It is simply not true. Think about it. The first human being to set eyes on the risen Christ was Mary. God loves his daughters well.

In the Old Testament we get glimpses of the outrageous tender love of God for us. But there was still sin, rebellion, disobedience that stood between us. When Christ took all of

that upon himself on Calvary, sin was dealt with once and for all. So now you can look yourself in the mirror on days when you don't feel so lovable and speak this over your soul, the Lord loves this daughter. If you're struggling right now, if heaven seems silent, I'm asking the Lord to give you the gift of faith where there is no sight. I'm asking him to give you -- you hope when it feels as if it is almost gone, I'm asking you God to give you strength and a clear sky tonight to see the stars. It's so easy to quit praying when we feel as if God is not listening. I want you to know, God is listening. You are not alone.

I was asked to speak to a class of kindergartners; they were all about five years old. And one of the things that one of the little girls asked me was, "Could you teach me what is a very good prayer to pray when you're really tired." Which I thought was funny when you're five, "really tired." She said, "I feel like I've lost all my get-up-and-go." I said, "One of the most powerful prayers that any of us can pray, whether you're five or 95, whether you've walked for the Lord for years or perhaps some of this is pretty new to you, it is simply the name 'Jesus.'"

Do you know there is power in the name of the Lord? If you're somebody who grew up in the church and maybe memorized scripture as I do, we're very familiar with like Romans eight, verse 28: And we know that God causes all things to work for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. But if you're in a season right now where you're hurting, where you've been praying and praying and it doesn't seem to make a difference, why don't you read the two verses before that, Romans 8:26 and 27? There you'll discover that in those moments when you've run out of words, when you've run out of tears, when you're just exhausted, do you know the Holy Spirit prays for you? But the Holy Spirit also prays in accordance with God's will. He knows God's will for your life. So to think that the Holy Spirit is interceding on your behalf is such a gift!

We're just praying here at *LIFE Today* that we just want in fresh ways for you to understand the depth of the love of God for you. I got a little note from someone the other day who is in prison. He's starting a life sentence and asked if I would send him a Bible,

which I was happy to do. But I got a note back just saying that his prayer now for the rest of his life is that he will become a prayer warrior from behind bars. That's the beautiful thing. Sometimes they say, we're going to remove prayer from schools. You can't remove prayer from schools. If you've got anybody in the school who loves Jesus, trust me, we're praying. And when we begin to pray, God opens our eyes to see how you and I can make an incredible difference in this world because some other people are hurting right now. I want to introduce you to one of them. Would you watch this?

On the mission field:

Sheila: In the driest regions of Africa, there is often only one place to find water, deep underground. So deep in fact that it takes two people a full week of digging to reach it. Well, despite their efforts these hand-dug wells aren't deep enough, and the water remains unclean causing widespread illness from waterborne diseases. Recently, we learned of another danger we did not expect.

Open Captions:

>> My daughter went to the hole to get water. She was gone too long, and we began to worry. I went to check on her but only found her bucket. When I looked further down into the hole, I saw my daughter. She had fallen in and drowned.

Sheila: It's an unimaginable tragedy. A mother's worst nightmare! And yet the reality surrounding Merci and her family, the utter lack of safe water sources demands that they live with the risk.

Open Captions:

>> I feel so much pain when I think about what happened to her. It's crippling. And I have so much fear for my other children. If I send them to draw water, will the same thing happen to them?

Sheila: I don't want one more mother to go through what Merci has gone through. But this is something you and I can do something about. This did not need to happen. And that's why we're here. She's not asking for a lot. She's just looking for a place to send her children to actually get for the first time in their lives clean water.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: As long as I live, I will never ever forget Merci. We got the privilege of meeting with so many mothers and grandmothers, and every single one has a story to tell -- every single one is, you just feel the love of Christ for everyone but for some reason Merci just got into a place in my heart. I think it was because she asked me, her daughter had just died like five months before and I asked where her daughter was buried and she said it was kind of in a clearing of trees, not very far away. I asked her had she been back to the site since her daughter died. And she said, "No. No, I can't go back." Which I totally understood but after we spent some time with her, talking with her, and praying over her and her children she asked me, she said, "Would you walk with me to the place where had my daughter is buried?" It is one of the most sacred walks I've ever taken in my life and the closer we got the more she just began to kind of collapse into my arms.

The fact her name is Merci just stuck with me. It made me think of even, and I know you know this scripture but Micah, chapter 6, verse eight says this: What are we supposed to do for the Lord? Do you want these burnt offerings? What can we do? It says, "No, oh people, the Lord has told you what is good. And this is what he requires of you; to do what is right, to love Merci, and to walk humbly with your God."

To do what is right when you and I have the ability to change the lives of these villages, to make it that not one mother has to take that terrible walk to see why her daughter has taken so long to come back from the well. I cannot imagine the agony of looking into a well and there's your daughter. I mean, it's beyond belief.

That's why I feel this so urgently. This is our last week of Water for LIFE. We are committed to putting wells in villages, but we cannot do it without you. As much as you will help, we will drill wells. And we can all get involved at some level. For \$48 you can provide clean water for ten children! If you're able to put in a whole well, that's \$4800! What a wonderful thing to be able to give as a legacy from a family or a Bible study group or a Sunday school class!

We're going to put a number up on your screen and I'm asking you, please, as this is our last week. We're going back soon to Africa. We want to go back with the great news that we shared the stories. It is hard for Merci to sit there and tell her story, to revisit that place but she did it so that other mothers won't have to suffer. So please, will you go to your phone? Will you make just the best gift that you can? And together we can change the world one at a time.

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."

This is the last week! Please call, write or make your gift online!

End of video

On the mission field

James: These ladies are here washing, and you can see by looking at the water, the water is totally contaminated and we know for a fact that thousands of people have died in this area. So we must, I mean, just absolutely must drill water wells here and literally give these people a future. This is typical of all of southern Africa.

We need your help and we ask you to help provide the answer and the remedy to this very serious problem. When you've got children dying every day because of contaminated water

sources... We can turn that situation into a situation of hope. So would you be that source of inspiration and help by making the best gift you can today?

End of clip

In the studio

Sheila: This is our last week for Water for LIFE. It is a campaign I love and I'm committed to. If you've given before, can I just ask you would you give again? The need is still there. We want to be able to put wells in as many villages as we can so these tragedies don't happen. They're not asking for a lot. They're not asking for an iPhone or a car, they just want to be able to give their child clean drinking water.

For any gift at all, I will send you my brand-new book, *Praying Women*; how to pray when you don't know what to say. So for James, Betty, from all of us here at *LIFE Today*, I'm Sheila Walsh and I look forward to seeing you next time.