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Week 27: WFL

Sheila Walsh

Ann Voskamp

Sheila: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh. Glad you stopped by. I hope you'll stay for the whole program because today we're going to actually be talking to a really good friend of mine. I have the privilege of interviewing so many people and I'm touched by each one of them but every now and again one of them becomes a close personal friend. That's why I'm going to actually show you an interview I did some time ago. You'll be able to tell that because my hair is different and the set is different and I'm wearing an outfit I will never wear again having just seen it.

But anyway, the interview I did was with Ann Voskamp. Ann is one of the most... it's like I feel like I'm looking at a crystal when I look at Ann because of the way she reflects the light and the love of Christ. But what you maybe don't know about her story is that she came from a place of desperate brokenness. She has gone through so much in her relatively short life. But it is out of those places that she writes with, I don't know, if you don't follow Ann Voskamp on Instagram you need to start because even just her little posts, it's like each word weighs so much.

That's why it is a real joy to be able to revisit this interview. So I know you're going to enjoy it. And if you stay tuned I'm going to let you know how to get a hold of her book. But let's watch Ann together.

Begin video clip

Ann: My first memory, Sheila is my little sister being killed in front of my mother and I. She was run over by a truck in our farmyard and killed. My growing up years, I was terrified. Death seemed like it was possible around any corner. I couldn't sleep as a little

girl. I was terrified, what if I didn't wake up? I had ulcers by the time I was seven. My teen years I was cutting. By the time I was 18-19, I was having panic attacks at university. Anxiety and fear just seemed to hound me.

But if you wear a mask over all of that, the weight of that mask almost kills you. I got to the place where I realized that when I wore a mask, what ultimately got masked was the power of Christ in my life. Like if I could just take the mask off and say, "I'm broken. I have fears. I am wrestling and I'm Jacob clinging to God." I could take that off and the power of Christ could be seen; that in my weakness he got to be all the strength. That I got to say -- I could let go of trying to hold on. And sometimes you're a control freak but the energy, that doesn't take to try to control everything, just to let that go and say, "I am broken and Jesus is taking all the shards of my life and making a mosaic of grace."

Christ got all the glory and I could just lean into him. I didn't have to be perfect. All I needed to do was let him press my wounds into his wounds and by his wounds I am healed. So it really came to a place of grace is weightless. And could I just come to the place and say, "I need to take off all of the masks, all of the pressures I'm feeling to perform, to be perfect, and to step into the weightlessness of his grace. Jesus has finished it all."

Sheila: You know what's interesting though, Ann? I sometimes think, if we could just go away and live in the desert in a cave and be holy -- but you're a mom of how many children?

Ann: Seven kids now. Yes!

Sheila: Seven kids that you homeschool. Your husband is a farmer.

Ann: Yes! It's loud and gritty and dirty and wild and good!

Sheila: So how do you live at that level of vulnerability and brokenness with your

family?

Ann: I think that's one of the most important places to live it. I think it is to let the kids know, I'm preaching gospel out loud to myself all of the time. Where I have to go ahead and hold on to this verse and preach it back to myself. I have to go ahead and say, "Wait a second, what can I be grateful in this moment?" When I'm messing it up and I'm ranting and raving, I've got kids who say, "Mama, what can you be grateful right now?"

So I think to go ahead and model in front of our kids, because the kids know they don't have it together. So if mom and dad look like they have it together, there's this disconnect between, well, what's wrong with me? But when we can go ahead and model, mama doesn't have it together and I need Jesus desperately, that creates a safe space for everybody to go ahead and bring their brokenness. We know where to take that -- we take it to the cross.

So I think it's good and right for us to be in a posture as parents of lowliness and humility. It is not that we don't get it wrong, it's what are we going to do with it afterwards? And have that kind of attitude with the kids where I apologize to them and I can show them, "Mama messed it up, I'm going back to Jesus."

Sheila: I can imagine some people watching and thinking, honestly, I really don't want to be broken. I want to be whole.

Ann: But -- but if you can in the midst of that brokenness trust that in the broken places God's making abundance. The brokenness makes abundance. Look all through scripture. What do you see? Those broken moments when they're broken, they get multiplied. And multiplication happens in the brokenness. I think everybody wants to get to the place, I want change in my life. I want transformation. You can't get to change or transformation without brokenness.

Our lives are like seeds. If we want change, if we want yield, if we want new life in those

places a seed has to be broken to bring forth new life. We say we want to be the fragrance of Christ. Fragrance only comes from things, precious beautiful things that are crushed and broken. So don't be afraid of broken things. Those are places where things can be resurrected. Don't be afraid of broken things. Those are where everything is being redeemed.

So I know culture want us to escape from suffering, escape from brokenness; numb, do whatever you need to do to hide and bury it. But the degree to which you can embrace brokenness is the degree to which you will experience abundance. The degree to which you can embrace brokenness is the degree to which you can embrace intimacy because everybody is walking around with a broken heart. You lay your broken heart down on the table; the shortest distance between two hearts is sharing that brokenness. We want communion and intimacy. It comes out of being real and vulnerable and transparent with our brokenness.

I just think the metaphor we see through scripture is that Last Supper. We want communion. What does communion look like? Bread being broken; the wine, the grape being crushed into the wine and being passed around. Communion comes out of places where we're willing to be broken and given.

Sheila: Is all brokenness redeemable?

Ann: I believe so. There is bad brokenness; brokenness that is not -- brokenness that hinders us, brokenness that doesn't create flourishing in our lives. But good brokenness breaks bad brokenness. We can say the brokenness of humility, the brokenness of vulnerability, the brokenness of generosity, those are all good brokenness. So we take good brokenness and pour it into places of bad brokenness, the brokenness that doesn't create human flourishing. That begins to break the bad brokenness, and create redemptive stories, resurrection places.

Sheila: *Christianity Today* named you as one of the 50 most influential voices of

shaping Christian culture. That's important, Ann. And your blog is one of the top ten. One of my concerns at the moment is I feel like sometimes as Christians in this nation, our voices are getting louder, but our compassion is getting less. What do you have to say to that?

Ann: Cry. I think sometimes, quieter voices can carry greater weight. We don't need to raise our voices to be heard. God calls us to be still and know that I am God. Let's go to quiet places and hear what God is saying.

We see all the way through the New Testament, Christ, the character he most models is compassion. And compassion literally means, it means to sort of being hit in the gut. You're actually moved with compassion; it's that bending forward. Compassion, when you break down the word it means co-suffering. Passion means suffering.

If we are going to, as a church, as believers, have compassion, we all want that but who would want to step into places where we co-suffer with other people. I really believe that we're called as Christians to be compassionate people that will be like Jesus, like God. God says, "I'm Immanuel," God with us. Compassion means you're going to co-suffer with someone. You're going to come alongside them in broken places. I really believe if we're living like Immanuel, God with us, with-ness breaks brokenness. When you look around at people around you who are broken and say, "I'm going to walk with you. I'm going to stand with you," that means that as Christians we have cross-shaped lives, not comfort-shaped lives. So how can I live really shaped like a cross, cruciform? That means stepping into places of suffering and being like Jesus, stretching out my hands and reaching around somebody and pulling them close.

Sheila: Some people struggle with the idea of a loving God and the weight of suffering that there is in the world. What do you say to that?

Ann: I think that's the pounding question. So much as where is a good God in a brokenhearted, suffering world? I think he calls us as the church to be the answer to that

suffering; that we get to go ahead and we're to do what God himself does. God himself enters into the suffering. He weeps with us. He cries with us. We look at brokenness and we say, "Why is this happening?" We may not understand the reasons why but we know that it must be a very good reason because God himself is willing to experience that with us, to weep with us, to walk with us, to actually suffer with us. We see that on the cross.

So then we as Christians, as believers, what's the answer to suffering? We step into those suffering places and be like Jesus, the hands and feet of Jesus, and walk through those suffering places with people. So as Christians, we're not supposed to try to escape suffering, we're called to embrace that suffering because we know a brokenhearted healer who heals that suffering.

Sheila: Somebody I wanted to quote. It's a quote of yours. You said, "What matters most is not if our love makes other people change, but that in loving we change."

Ann: So oftentimes, we're result-oriented. If I love you this -- sometimes we get manipulative in our love. I love you because I'm hoping that this is the outcome. As opposed to, I love you unconditionally like God has loved me. And in loving you, I'm the one that gets changed and become more cruciform, more shaped like a cross. I become more like Jesus in surrendering and sacrificing myself.

I think ultimately, what we all long for... scripture says, "love bears all things." That word *bear* means stego. Love becomes like a roof for somebody; that I will go ahead and sort of break myself like a roof, to take the storm, to take the winds so that you have a safe place. That I'm not going to manipulate you or try to make you into what I want but it's a safe place for you to come and the love will change me. I'll become a roof and you have a safe place to be real and vulnerable. I'll be stego for you.

Sheila: What do you do, Ann, on the days when you're just worn out?

Ann: It was yesterday!

[Laughter]

Sheila: Me too, actually.

Ann: You know what? I go back to the Psalms over and over again. I think David's raw vulnerability, his lament with God; he is honest with God. He talks about his soul being so downcast and broken. And then as you read through each Psalm and the Psalms as a whole, again and again, yes, we come with our brokenness and our lament, and Jesus, he has hard stops, Jesus does, nine o'clock, six o'clock; hard stops are prayer where he is going back and he is reciting Psalms. I think if we can model that, that if we even have hard stops during the day, not rolling stops because then you kind of crash and burn, but at times when you say, I'm going to stop at 9:00, I'm going to stop at noon, I'm going to stop at six. I'm going to open up the Psalms. I'm going to be real and honest with God about the brokenness of just today. Of how today I've tripped and fallen, and things have been messy. But by the time you get to every Psalm you're back to who is God, I can worship God. I preach gospel back to myself, the truth about who God is and who I am in God.

So I think going back to the Psalms models what do we do with our brokenness? We are real with it and then God becomes more real to us as we're just open and transparent with him.

Sheila: I think one of the things to me that David models is that to the level that you're willing to be honest with God indicates the level of intimacy and trust that God actually loves you.

Ann: Yes! And you experience the communion. If you want real communion with God, you need to be deeply honest with God. He is big enough to take it. He wants the honesty.

Sheila: What would you say to somebody who is just watching and maybe just flipping through to another channel and thinks, well, that's lovely for you nice two Christian ladies, but God's not going to like me. I'm sitting here with half a bottle of Jack Daniels.

Ann: If you knew the level of my brokenness. I call it my "unspoken broken." I think we're all high functioning with our "unspoken broken" but deep down, we have brokenness that we don't even know how to articulate. I think there is more grace in Christ than there is guilt in me.

Sheila: Say that just one more time.

Ann: I hold on to it. There is more grace in Christ than there is guilt in me. Jesus is drawn to the brokenhearted. Jesus, the places that I don't want to draw attention to, Jesus is drawn to those brokenhearted places because he wants to draw something beautiful in those places. The places that I most don't want anyone to see, God most wants to touch those places.

So I think the church, we need to strip off the masks because the outside world knows our own hypocrisy. When we come and say, "I'm so broken! Here are my vulnerable places. Let me tell you about things that I'm going to whisper, they're so broken. But can I take you to Jesus? He has got scars and he wants to press his scars into your scars. That's the only place that I know to take my suffering and my brokenness."

So I think, we, as the church, if we can be really honest about our brokenness, that person sitting in a hotel room knows that if the church isn't for the suffering, the church isn't for Christ. The church is the safest place to come with your brokenness. We'll be stego for you. We will be a safe place for you to come and be really real and we will love you unconditionally, always, like Christ has loved us in our own brokenness.

Sheila: Ann, as well as having a huge family, as well as homeschooling them, you then decided there was room in your heart for one more little girl from China who came to you

broken. How is she doing?

Ann: She came to us with a literal broken heart. She has half a heart. I guess it was -- she was about me knowing my own broken heartedness, my own realization about I've been abandoned in so many ways and Jesus adopted me, Jesus grafted me in, Jesus wanted me when nobody else wanted me. So adopting a child has been about me understanding and getting to live out exactly what I've experienced. You are never abandoned; you are placed where you are so God can raise you.

Shiloh has been very -- Shiloh's broken heart has healed so much of my own broken heartedness. Every morning when I go to change her, she is two, and I get her dressed. She has this big scar down the midst of her chest where they have had to actually open up her chest. She has had two open heart surgeries, she has got one more in front of her. And she goes, "Mama! Shiloh's brave. Look, mama, Shiloh's brave."

I think all of us have our own scars that nobody sees and every day we have to be so brave to just get out of bed and put one step in front of the other. And Jesus reaches over and takes our hand and says, "I am with you. You are never abandoned. You are never alone. And when you can't take one more step, I will carry you."

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: I think that last sentence was for one of you right now -- you know, watching in thinking, nobody cares about me. Nobody would be worse off if I wasn't on the planet anymore. And maybe Ann's words reach into that darkest place in you and let you know, you are not abandoned. You are loved.

The hard thing is there is so much brokenness in life that you think, well, you sit there and you talk to me about a God of love and a God who cares but if he loves me and if he cares then why did I go through these things? And I will not even pretend to come up

with an answer. I don't know. I really don't know. But what I do know and what I believe as deep as the marrow in my bones is that God sees you, that God knows you, that God loves you and he will use your very brokenness to be a conduit of love to other people.

I have a little kind of stone that my son made for me when he was four or five. It is in the yard. It's got cement and lots of little pieces of broken glass and broken pottery. And then he wrote with his little finger, "I love you, mom." I have it there obviously because I love it. My son made it. But I have it there because it is a daily reminder to me when I go out with my coffee that it is amazing what God will do with a broken life if you give him all the pieces.

That's what Ann shows us, the beauty of brokenness. And I've encountered that in a lot of places, just even in the last year. One of those places is a place I'd like to take you with me. I want you to come with me all across the world to Africa and I want to introduce you to some people who need a new kind of normal.

On the mission field:

Open Captions:

Zambia: How to get water.

Sheila: So they walk all this way, and this is what they come to. Wow!

Ralph: Oh wow! Look at the flies and all. That's just nasty. That is so filthy.

Sheila: It's so hard. I mean watching them pull this up knowing that potentially this could make them so sick. You just want to...

Ralph: She drinks that.

Sheila: But they're thirsty. It's all they've got. The thing that I find horrifying, honestly, Ralph is not one of these children has ever had a glass of clean water. Not one in their

whole life! It's wrong! It's just wrong!

Ralph: It breaks your heart. It's very dangerous, even deadly. We've heard stories of death.

Sheila: This is normal for these children. They have to do this 2-3 times every day. So this water, this contaminated water, they think this is normal. That's all they've ever known. But when we come in with *LIFE Today* and we drill a well, deep down, encase the well, suddenly, clean water will become their new normal.

I would never let my child drink water from this, and I don't want these children to do it anymore. Would you help us drill a well so that for the first time in their life they have a new normal, fresh clean water? But we need your help and the need is urgent, we need your help now.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: So I saw both of those things on the same day. During the day, we were in a village where that literally was all they had. It was just horrifying. Everything within you, whether you're a mother or a father or just a human being, everything within you revolts against watching children drink water like that knowing that many of those little ones have already lost siblings because the water was so filthy and they could not survive.

But then later as we were driving back to the little place where we were staying, they said, "Do you want to see a place where one of our *LIFE Outreach* wells has gone in?" I'm like, "Yes!" I can't tell you what it was like. The contrast to get out of our little truck and there was this well in the village with *LIFE Outreach International* and the kids were getting water from it. And they gave me a glass to drink and I drank it! I drank every single drop! And I drank it with joy, and I drank it with a prayer of thanksgiving for people like you who have faithfully helped us through the years.

But the need is still there. It's great. We are praying that we will be able to finish our commitment this year for Water for LIFE. But we still need to be able to drill 150 wells. Now that might seem like an impossible task but it is not. You've done it before and I believe that we can do it again. And here's how we do it. We do it by you doing your part and me doing mine.

So if you could give \$48 that will give clean water to ten children. Can you imagine? Ten of those little ones for the first time in their life will drink a glass of clean water. I saw some of these and they were like, "Wow! This is amazing."

I think sometimes, I'm always say to myself, "I should drink more water. I should drink more water." Forgetting that there are people in the world dying -- literally dying to have a drink of clean water. So if you could give a bit more, \$144 will give clean water for 30 children. If you are able perhaps with your family or your small group or your Sunday school class, get together and determine that you're going to do a whole well. That's \$4800 and that will give water for 1,000 people in a village for their life.

So please, will you call that number on your screen? Will you just give whatever you can? If we all give whatever we can or go online but please, give the best gift you can so that when we go back the next time to Africa we can bring back more footage and let you see the difference that you have made. So please, call that number, go online and just give the best gift that you possibly can. Give Water for LIFE in Jesus' name.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Dirty, diseased filled water! How desperate would a mother need to be to consider giving this contaminated substance to her child? For many mothers and their families living in extreme poverties, this is their only choice.

With your help, they won't have to make this choice ever again. Mission Water for Life provides clean disease-free water for thousands of children and their families, giving them a life free from the fear of death.

With your gift today, you can help drill and establish the final 150 water wells this year. Your gift of \$48 will help provide water for ten people. \$72 will provide for 15. \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime. And a gift of \$4,800 will help sponsor a complete well, serving up to 1,000 people.

With your gift we'll send you Today is a Good Day, seasonal devotional sets, broken out into the four seasons of the year. This beautiful set features a daily scripture, inspirational thoughts, and a place for you to journal your own thoughts, prayers and insights from God's word.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the leather-bound life-giving Proverbs Journal, filled with wisdom and daily encouragement from Proverbs, including lined pages for your personal notes.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1,200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4,800 to help sponsor a complete well. And you may request "A Mother's Strength" bronze sculpture.

Please call, write, or make your gift online!

End of video

On the mission field:

James: These are beautiful children and beautiful families that have come here to contaminated water sources. With your help, we're giving, not only here in Africa help to people but in countries all over the world where people are dying of diseases from contaminated water. We can drill wells in scores of countries if you would just help drill

one well. Maybe you could drill a well or join one or two other people to drill one.

We need every person watching to do your part in helping provide families like this and children like this water sources, non-contaminated water, clean water in nations throughout the world. And every time we do it, we inspire others to join us. So would you be that source of inspiration and help by making the best gift you can today?

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: Thank you so much! If the lines busy just be persistent. Keep calling! And for any gift at all we will send you Ann's amazing book, *The Broken Way: A daring path into the abundant life*. You can tell when you read a book from someone who has written out of the depth of their pain that there's such an anointing on this book. So we'd love to send that to you.

Or also, if you'd like to get, for any gift, we'll send you our four seasons devotional. And for \$100 gift we'll send you our beautiful journal with Proverbs. Some of the greatest teachings in the Word of God are from Proverbs: Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight, Proverbs 3:5-6. It's a promise. We love you! And we'll see you next time on *LIFE Today*.