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Week 28: Water for LIFE

Sheila Walsh

"When Life Doesn't Make Sense"

Sheila: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. I'm so glad to be you. I spent a lot of time this morning just thinking and praying about this program. As you well know, 2020 will be remembered as the year when we face this virus that just shifted everything. It took away what was normal, what we understood what we could do and the impact on America, on Europe, and all around the world has been devastating. So it made me kind of want to start by asking you, how are you doing? When I ask that question, I always ask it twice. How are you doing? Because so often in our society and our culture we just think that we're supposed to say, "Okay." "Great." "Fine." But I've actually wondered how are you doing? How are you doing in this situation that perhaps doesn't make any sense at all?

That led me in my own devotions this morning to a passage that has really impacted my life. It's honestly been a puzzling passage to me for a lot of my life. I want to explain why but I want to also put it in context of why John the Baptist hit a real crisis point in his faith when he was someone, he was the one who had been chosen to publicly identify that Jesus was in fact the Messiah.

There is many years in John's life that we don't very much about. We know that Elizabeth and Zechariah and his parents were old when they had him. Zechariah died first, and then Elizabeth not that much longer. So basically, John was raised in a community in the desert called the Essenes. They were a community who lived a very simple, frugal, strict life. If you've ever been in Israel or in that part of the world, the desert gets really hot and

dry. And John took a vow to be, it was called "the Nazarene vow" where he never cut his hair, he never drank strong drink, he just lived this very simple, austere life preparing for that one moment when God would tell him, "Okay, John, this is what you're here for." And he would have the privilege of publicly pointing out the one who was the son of God, who was Israel's Messiah.

But at the point that I'm going to read to us first, John has now been in jail for two long years. And this is what we read. This is Matthew 11. It says: *When Jesus had finished giving these instructions to his 12 disciples, he went out to teach and preach in towns throughout the region. John the Baptist, who was in prison heard about all the things that Messiah was doing so he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the Messiah we've been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?" Jesus told them, "Go back to John and tell him what you've seen and heard. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the good news is being preached to the poor."*

But then this little verse tagged on at the end: *"And tell him, God blesses those who do not turn away because of me."*

Another translation, N.I.V. Says: "Blessed are those who are not offended by me."

Now I found myself when I would read that as a younger teenager thinking, why would John of all people doubt? Because if we go a little earlier, you will read the declaration that John made which makes his declaration from prison even more confusing. But I think it will really speak to you and I.

This is John 1:29: *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I was talking about when I said, "A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me. I didn't recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel."*

Now listen to this: *Then John testified, "I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. I didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, 'The one in whom you see the spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'"*

But it is this verse here, this is verse 34: *"I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the chosen one of God."*

So John went through all of that. He grew up, their families knew each other. He would be familiar with Jesus. He was about a year older. But then one day God said to him, "John, there he is." And so John was able to baptize Jesus. It is one of the only places in scripture where you see the three persons of the godhead in one place. You have Jesus, the son of God going down into the baptismal waters. And as he comes out, the Holy Spirit descends on him like a dove, and then God the Father says, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

So how come just a few years later after John has been in prison for two years is he sending his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one or did I get it all wrong?"

I don't know how you respond when life doesn't go as you expect it to go. You've been praying for something, not something trivial but something that really matters, and God just doesn't come through in any way that makes sense to you. I can only imagine, I mean the kind of prison that John was in, it was in Herod's palace way down deep in the dungeons. It would be dark and dank and a miserable place. And you know that the enemy loves to come after us when we're down anyway. And I just imagine -- I just imagine Satan the accuser of the brethren saying to John, "What if you got it all wrong? What if you spent your whole life preparing for that one moment but you identified the wrong man? Look at it! Where are you John? You're in prison. Doesn't seem like he is coming to get you."

Now why would that have been so crucial for John? You have to remember that when we're reading this, we have all of scripture. John, they had the Old Testament. They had the writings of the prophet Isaiah. I wonder how many times as a boy John heard this very passage being read out. Now remember, John is now sitting in prison, he's been there for two years and he remembers this passage.

Let me read to you from Isaiah 61: *"The spirit of the sovereign Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released, and prisoners will be freed. He sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the Lord's favor has come."*

So John has been waiting for this Messiah and now he is in prison. And Jesus isn't coming. And in all his inner pain, in all the darkness, because remember he is a man who lived his life out in the wide open, and now he is in this cramped prison cell and doubts begin to flood in. What if I got it wrong? So he sends this message. He says to his friends, "Please go and ask him, are you the promised Messiah or did I get this all wrong?"

And the interesting thing is when Jesus sends the message back, he tells him some of the things from Isaiah 61, about good news, and about the deaf hearing. He doesn't mention the part about prisoners being released. And then this little phrase, "Blessed is he, blessed is she who is not offended by me." Who doesn't turn away from faith because of Jesus.

I wonder if you've ever found yourself in a place like that. It's like, you know Lord, I've honored you with my whole life. I did everything that was right for my children as they were growing up. I took them to church, I read them the Word of God, I taught them to pray and now they've just gone completely away. Why didn't you keep them safe in the fold? Why did you allow them to go off into drugs? Or maybe it is in your marriage. Maybe you're struggling in your marriage right now and you're thinking, I waited for the right person and now nothing in my life makes sense anymore.

The great question of these two passages but particularly, Christ's response to John's disciples is will you love a God you don't always understand? Will you still trust when nothing in your life makes sense?

I saw that in the life of my mother-in-law, Eleanor. She was about 65, I think, when she got the diagnosis that she had liver cancer. And she and I had never been particularly close. She wasn't thrilled that I married her son. At times she could be a little challenging, a little difficult. In fact, it is the only time in my life I've ever had somebody stand like an inch from my face and yell loudly. We don't do that so much in Scotland. We tend to be a quieter breed. But she was a fiery, feisty woman. She was not always excited that I was in Barry's life.

But I remember getting the phone call one day. She rang and I said, "Oh hey, Eleanor. Let me go get Barry."

She said, "No, actually. I want to talk to you."

I said, "Great. Okay."

She said, "I just received the news that I have liver cancer and they've given me 18-month to 2 years to live."

I said, "Okay. Here's the deal. I'm going to buy you a plane ticket. I want you to fly into Nashville, (where we were living at the time) and I want to take you to one of the number one cancer specialists in the country."

So she did that. She flew in and I picked her up at the airport. And we went to the appointment. After some tests, the doctor came back and said, "No, I agree with the initial diagnosis. I think you have 18 months to 2 years to live."

So Eleanor flew back to Charleston where they were living. At that point I was part of, I

don't know if you remember Women of Faith. I was part of a women's conference for 20 years where we did about 30 weekends every year in arenas just talking about the love of God. We were just kind of a core team and a worship team. And at that point I was pretty busy on the road.

Eleanor called me one day and she said, "I've made a decision."

I said, "Oh! What's that?"

She said, "I've decided that at least for the next year I'm going to come with you wherever you go."

I was like, "Yay!" Because she was a little difficult. I said, "But what about your chemotherapy treatments?"

She said, "Well, I'll just take your schedule to the doctor and I will say to him, 'Can you work around this schedule?'"

And honestly, in my heart I felt the Lord say, "Sheila, just back off."

So I said, "Okay. That's awesome. That's what we will do."

So for almost 13 months, Eleanor traveled with us everywhere we went. And honestly, she didn't like me much more during all of those 13 months, but I saw her with our son Christian. He was just a little boy at the time, and she got to spend all her time with him. It was a beautiful thing.

But she so desperately wanted to be healed. So every single weekend we would bring her back in the green room where all the different speakers and worship leaders would meet, and we would lay hands on her and pray for God to heal her. And if she found out of anybody who had a healing ministry, she would ask me to take her there and I did. And

we went to some pretty weird meetings, let me tell you. But she was just desperate for God to heal her.

When it became clear that the way God was going to heal her was to take her home, for the last three months of her life, they moved a hospice bed into her home and Barry and Christian and I moved into the house to take care of her. And I'll never forget one night when I thought she was asleep, and I would usually take the night shift because I did better during the night than Barry did or than William, or husband. They were both part of the Lutheran church and they loved the great hymns of the faith. So what I would do is I would get in bed besides Eleanor and I would quietly sing through the hymn book during the night knowing she loved these great hymns.

One night when I was sure that she'd fallen asleep because we had given her a little morphine to take the edge off the pain, she said something that kind of shocked me. She said, "You know, Sheila, if it had been you that had gotten cancer, God would have healed you."

I said, "Eleanor, what do you mean?"

She said, "Well, I've not always lived the kind of life that I think I should have lived. And I know I have made life really difficult for you." She said, "That's why God's not healing me."

I looked at her and I said, "Mom, I promise you that is not true. God does not love me one grain of sand more than he loves you. I don't pretend to understand everything, but this is not because God is punishing you. There's some things we will never understand until we are all home."

And the last few weeks of her life were actually pretty amazing. She and I became so close. We talked about her life. We sang hymns together. We prayed together. I would play worship playlists for her. And she would ask every question that had been hidden

deep in her heart because she thought you can't ask God difficult questions.

I remember reading that passage to her and saying, "This is what Jesus sent back to John." I'm sure Jesus felt like John, I wish I could go there. I wish I could sit down and explain everything to you. I wish I could tell you that in just a few weeks I'm going to be betrayed, I'm going to be crucified, but three days later, John, I'm going to be raised from the dead and you're coming with me. But he couldn't do that. All he could do is send back this message, "Blessed are you who are not offended by me."

I remember saying to her, "Mom, do you think you could be in that place where you could actually say, 'God, I don't like this. I don't understand this. But I love you in the midst of this.'" And to watch my mother-in-law find in her dying what she had longed for in her life, a relationship with God based on nothing she brought to the table, a relationship with God that doesn't necessarily answer all our questions. But when you come to a place where you determine that God is love, not only that God is love, but that God loves you right now.

Maybe there is some tough questions that you need to ask God and that is completely okay. I believe that to the level that you are willing to be honest with God is actually an indication of how much you trust him. If you think you have to be careful with God, your picture is too small. God knows everything about you right now and he loves you completely.

There are so many things we don't understand but do you know that heaven rejoices when in the midst of our not understanding, in the midst of tears rolling down our face we raise our hands towards heaven and say I don't understand but I love you.

When that kind of love seeps into all the cracks and all the brokenness, it almost like... it's almost like Jesus washes your eyes for a second time and you start to see people differently. Not as somebody who has a problem or has an issue but as another human being who is struggling and suffering. Empathy is one of the greatest gifts but it's also

very much as you know at the heart of everything we do here at *LIFE Outreach* because there is some people right now who need to know that God hears their prayers and that you and I can be an answer. Watch this.

On the mission field:

Announcer: Desolation. Desperation. Death. These are the constant companions of countless mothers throughout the nation of Zambia. Mothers like Hilda.

Open Captions:

>> My name is Hilda Ngoma. I am a widow. My husband died this past year. I had seven children, but now I have six. One child died. His name was Emanuel.

Announcer: Like so many mothers in her region, Hilda returns each day to her child's killer, contaminated water drawn from a hand-dug well.

Open Captions:

>> I know other families that have suffered the loss of children. This always reminds me of my child.

Announcer: Despite the horrific knowledge that had claimed the life of her son, Hilda has no choice but to continue giving this deadly water to her remaining children.

Open Captions:

>> I'm afraid that my other children will die. I have one boy who is sick now.

Announcer: Though her situation is dire, Hilda's fears do not have to be realized. There is a solution. We can mend the broken hearts of these mothers and provide the cure for their suffering.

Open Captions:

>> I would be so grateful for our village to have clean water. Everyone who drinks this

dirty water gets sick. Clean water would change the lives of everyone here.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: I fell in love with the women and children in Zambia. They are just such beautiful people, such loving people, such big hearts -- but with such brokenness in their hearts for their children. As a mom I can't imagine that knowing that the very water I gave to one of my children caused their death, and that's all I've got now to give to the remaining children. I can't imagine what that's like.

It probably seems like a million miles away but it's always amazing to me. It's like on a flight here in Dallas, Texas and I'll fly to London and then within no time at all I'm walking in Africa, I'm walking and I'm meeting these women and I'm hearing their stories. I've just come from a place where we let the shower run for like three or four minutes to get warm enough before we get in or we just waste water. It is not because we're calloused, we just don't think about it -- we don't think about it.

But having walked alongside these women, I can't *not* think about it now. At the beginning of the year, our commitment was to be able to drill 350 wells and some of you have really stepped up and helped and I wanted to say thank you. So we still have 150 wells that we've committed to drill this year. But the great news is if you all respond we can do more than that. We can go on and drill another 50 wells because in every village there is such need!

We drive for hours and on the worst roads I've ever been on in my life. Because you think, well, cannot they just go somewhere else and get water? No! There is nothing within hundreds of miles. That's all they have. And the men in the village, they'll dig a well, they'll dig as deep as they can but all they're accessing is filthy, disease-ridden water.

But when we go in with our team, and I got to watch it with my own eyes, when they drill down through one, two, three layers until they finally reach the clean water that there is in Africa and it spurts up and it's just like -- I mean, I just joined all the children. We just danced because it was so glorious. But to go from that to then go to the villages where that is just a dream and a prayer. So many of these moms are praying women, and the amazing thing is you and I get to be the answer to that prayer.

So here's what we can do. If you can contribute \$48 that will provide clean water for ten of those children for their lifetime. Where else could you have that kind of impact with \$48? For \$144 you can give clean water to 30 children. And if you could rally a bunch of your friends, you could say, okay, we're going to do this together. We're going to put in a well in a village. You can do that for \$4800. We'll put a well in and give clean water for their lifetime for 1,000 people.

So please! Would you call that number on your screen? Go online, give the very best gift you can. Let's give clean water 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: Let me just say this about the well. Here we are in an area where over 2,000 children have just been fed but the whole thing started not only with a need for food but also providing water which became the center of life. Now there is a school here. So you've got school feeding, you've got fresh water. They're not only drinking it and the whole village here are using it as a water source but they're washing -- their desperate to clean up their dishes with clean water.

I'm telling you, the wells like this that you can have a part in of either giving the well or giving a portion of it, it changes everything in the entire area. If you can help give other wells here in Africa please do it because it is going to take all of us working together, and

it takes people just like you providing as love provided here. Do what you can to help us drill more wells, please.

End of clip

Sheila: Thanks for staying with me. If you watch us every day, I don't know if sometimes it just gets familiar and it kind of washes over you and I totally understand that, but the need is real and the need is right now. Even as I'm watching that piece I remember that darling mom and her other children and that sweet little one just lying there; you could tell didn't have the energy to get up and play because he wasn't feeling well at all. Let's do this as the body of Christ. Let's determine that we will be the answer to these mothers' prayers. And they're not asking for a lot. They're just asking to be able to give their children clean drinking water.

So please persist. Dial that number, get in touch, give the best gift you can, and we'll make a difference this this world. So for all of us here at *LIFE Today*, I'm Sheila Walsh. God bless you!