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Week 26: WFL
Wednesdays in the Word
Sheila Walsh
Kay Warren

Sheila: Hi! I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to Life Today. I have the great privilege in this position of interviewing so many amazing people. And sometimes there's one or two interviews that really just stick with me and I think I would like to revisit that. And that is exactly what we're going to do today. It's a little different. We're going to throw to an interview I did before, which you will be able to tell by the fact that my hair looks totally different and I can't tell whether I was five pounds up or five pounds down at that time. But you know, that's life!

But this woman, Kay Warren, I cannot tell you how much I love and respect her. I loved and respected her before she went through what I think has to be one of the most unspeakable tragedies. But I have to tell you I love and respect her even more now. I don't know whether you have experienced any kind of mental illness in your family but I believe that Kay has some words that will speak to us all. Watch this!

Begin video clip

Kay: My Matthew was amazing. But he had mental illness from the time he was very young. He was diagnosed with clinical depression when he was seven, but he could have been diagnosed earlier if we had known that children can have a mental illness. We didn't know. We just thought he was different than his brother and sister. We thought the things, the ways he acted and the ways that he thought, that he would outgrow them. We didn't know that he was living with a mental illness from the time he was about three or four. Who knew that children could struggle that young? But he did -- he struggled until the

day he died when he was 27. His illness got worse and worse. He definitely fell into the category of severe mental illness.

If I could just digress for a second. Sometimes with mental illness that's what we think of. We think of someone so ill like my son who can't really function in this life. But actually, I have lived with depression my whole life; not severe depression but I have depression. Everybody feels anxious sometimes. It's when those things start to cross over and get in the way of normal life. When anxiety and depression, or you just can't cope with friends or work or job, then it starts moving over into mental illness.

But even so, that's not that everybody is like my Matthew. But he lived most of his life with a severe mental illness. He started talking about suicide when he was 12. Since he's died, I've found some of his writings where he was actually talking about it sooner, but we didn't know it.

One of the worst days of my life was a Mother's Day when he was 12. It had been hard day. We knew he was depressed. As I kind of tucked him in that night, in the dark, I'd just prayed with him and was getting ready to walk out of the room and as I started to leave he said, "Mom, will you kill me and put me out of my misery?"

I was so glad that the room was dark because he couldn't see my face. I managed to get through that and say, "Oh buddy, I'm so sorry that you're feeling so sad. I love you so much." Did my best; walked out of the room.

My older son was standing out in the hall and I collapsed in his arms. And my thought was, no mother should ever hear her child say, "Please kill me" on Mother's Day, "and put me out of my misery." But it was the agony and the torture that he lived with.

Of course, doctors, medication, programs, hospitalizations, everything that we knew to do, and yet by the time Matthew was 27 he didn't really want to die, he just wanted the pain to stop. And as I talk to people, that is what I hear over and over again, "I don't

really want to die. I just want the pain to stop." And there is that sense of, sometimes people feeling as he obviously did the day that he took his life that there was no other way out. There was no option. It was never going to be any different.

So my heart just... It was the worst day of my life. It was my nightmare that he would eventually take his life. I can tell you that we were devastated and are devastated but we are not destroyed. That's the hope for us and for anyone living with mental illness. There can be devastation, but it does not mean that you will be destroyed. I believe that. I believe it for us even though we've lost our Matthew.

He's actually -- he's in heaven, he's in the arms of Jesus and so I know I'll see him again. So even for him, the devastation was not complete. God redeems. And in our lives, his dad and I, and his brother and sister, all those who loved him, devastation but we are not destroyed.

Sheila: One of the things that I'm so grateful that you and Rick are very much involved in is helping educate the church. Because last year I was speaking in a church and I talked about my father's suicide. I said, "So many people called my father a coward. They don't understand how hard he fought to make it to 33. That's not the act of a coward. He'd just come to the place where he couldn't do it anymore."

Kay: It makes me mad. It makes me mad when people say that because it just shows they don't understand. I just try to say they don't understand and not stay angry. But when people say, "That's the coward's way out." No, I'm sorry. They don't have any idea. That just means you have never walked into spare shoes. If you have walked into spare shoes you know that it takes every ounce of courage to live one more day; to get out of bed one more day, to face those sometimes screaming voices in your head that tell you to end it, that it's never going to change, the enemy wanting to take you down. To live one more day and to fight through one more day of that takes the greatest amount of courage.

I actually think some of the greatest heroes, when we get to heaven, are going to be the

people that as we see them and as we meet all the other folks in heaven, some of the greatest heroes are going to be the people who fought every single day of their life to live.

Sheila: I absolutely agree with that. But the thing that was devastating for me was after I had talked about how I couldn't wait for that day when I would see my dad again, and at the end a woman had to practically carry this young woman to talk to me because her dad had committed suicide six months before and the church had told her that her dad was in hell. My heart was just broken for her. Also, I wanted to find the people who told her that and said say, "Where did you find that?"

Kay: First I want to pound them and then I want to show them the verses in scripture.

Sheila: It is so cruel. Do you see a shift, Kay? Do you think we're learning more in the church about how to deal?

Kay: Slowly -- really slowly -- especially around suicide. I think there is some great progress around talking about mental illness. I think that as people understand more and more that it is real and it is common and it is treatable, that it is not that you're weak in character or that if you pray just a little bit more or confess a sin, when they understand that mental illness is an illness I think that that's helping in the church with people getting rid of the stigma.

But when it comes to suicide and suicidal thoughts, it's a much slower progression of understanding. For us to be able -- this may sound weird, but it gives me such joy to be able to talk to families who have lost someone. Their family member loved Jesus and yet they're fearful of where they are. I love to be able to bring the comfort to them of John 10 where Jesus said, "I know my sheep and they're in my hands and nothing -- no one can take them out of my hands."

I've had people say, "But this person took themselves out of Jesus' hand."

I'm like, "Excuse me, he said, 'No one can take them out of my hands.'" Romans eight: Nothing can separate us, neither life nor death, nor demons or principalities -- nothing can separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ."

So to be able to say to people, "Your loved one loved Jesus, they're in his arms."

Sheila: My dad was an amazing singer and his favorite hymn he used to sing was "There were 99 that safely lay in the Shelter of the Fold." It took me... I probably was in my late 30s when I had the courage to go to the place where my dad drowned himself. But what I thought might have been a place of tremendous despair actually was a place of tremendous peace because I felt as if I heard Jesus say, "That night I went out and I found my lost sheep and I carried him home."

Kay: I say when Matthew's, when his body fell, he shot himself, and as his body fell Jesus grabbed him. There were angels in that room, and they carried him into the presence of God. He didn't hit the ground alone and out of Jesus' love. Jesus was there. Jesus caught him. Jesus caught him.

Sheila: [Sighing] I had the privilege of speaking at your Church and Mental Health Symposium, and I know this is an ongoing passionate work for you. There was quite an interesting group of people you had there. One of the gentlemen I got to speak to had been the former head of the American Psychiatric Association. I loved him! I had lunch with him and...

Kay: Well, he loved you!

Sheila: I remember him saying to me, "Mental illness is not curable but it is treatable." I thought that was fantastic information for people who think -- because I've had people say to me, "Well, Sheila, do you still take medication?"

I'm like, "Yes, I do. I take that pill with a prayer of thanksgiving every day."

And they're like, "Don't you believe Jesus can heal you?"

I'm like, "Absolutely I believe he can and if he will, I'll let you know. And until then I'll take my pill with a prayer of thanksgiving."

Kay: And that goes to that still trying to dispel that stigma around mental illness as being something in your character or if you just try harder or pray harder, whatever, that it's going to go away.

Does Jesus heal instantly? Of course, he does. We all know the stories. People who are healed of addiction in an instant. People who are healed of cancer. Mental... yes! He does it. He doesn't usually choose to do that though. So for the rest of us who don't receive that kind of an instantaneous miracle, it doesn't have anything to do with faith it has to do with God's sovereignty and what he has chosen to do in each person's life.

So what I try to tell people is there's not just any one solution or one way to deal with mental illness. We're a whole. God has made us body, soul, and spirit. There are things that have to happen in our minds, things that have to happen in our bodies, things that have to happen in our emotions to give us the ability to manage a mental illness well.

So go to your doctor. Take blood tests. See if there is something that is going on that is causing some of the symptoms. Eat as well as you can. Get sleep. Exercise; take care of your body. Go and get a diagnosis from a psychiatrist if these things are not helping. See if there is a medication that you might need to be on.

Emotionally, you and I all have broken places that we need healing, ways that we've adapted to life. Therapy counselling, I'm a big believer. I've done my share of it. Relationally, people with mental illness tend to burn bridges with relationships so there is healing. And spiritually, draw close to God in intimacy. We are whole beings. So for mental illness to be managed, all of those things need to transpire; medication... but

Sheila, I know you would say you are also working on your relationship with Jesus every single day.

Sheila: And also acknowledging spiritual warfare. We don't just fight against flesh and blood. There's been nights when I... that's been part of my story all my life that I've struggled with suicidal thoughts. Sometimes my only prayer is just the name of Jesus. There are nights that literally that's all I can do is speak the name of Jesus.

Kay: I don't know if you understand the power of what you just said on a television show to millions of people. [Emotional] That you said, "I have lived with suicidal thoughts my whole life." And yet here you sit, Sheila as somebody who is saying, "Jesus Christ is my all in all. I will live every day of my life for him." The freedom of you saying that, I'm a little bit... I don't even know the words. I just feel like God is unchaining people who have lived with such shame about their own mental illness and their suicidal thoughts. Who do they tell? Who do they tell? For you to say that...

Sheila: Don't you think that it is just time that we shine the brightest light into the darkest corners of the church?

Kay: It is!

Sheila: That whatever you're struggling with, with whatever it is, one of my favorite verses is in Psalm 56. It says that God gathers all our tears, he captures them in his bottle and I think that there's a... In fact, I have a little... I stuck it in my pocket before I left today. This actually is a little tear bottle. I think one of the most profound things because I think there is some people probably even watching who think, nobody on this earth understands the weight of what I've wept or how much, but God does. He understands the weight.

I have maybe a strange question, but did Matthew ever feel like God let him down?

Kay: I think that was one of the hardest things for us as his parents. I mean his dad wrote a book called *The Purpose Driven Life* and to have his son struggle with God and God's purpose for him, it was such agony for Rick to know that he could help so many other people and yet his dearest son struggled with finding and hearing God's purpose.

Matthew accepted Christ as a little boy and loved Jesus. But as he got older and his own personal struggles were magnified and became more intense, and as the mental illness clouded his thinking and interrupted some of the logical clear thoughts that you and I have, he began to feel like God had let him down.

I watched my son, sometimes say, "I just need him to come and sit on this couch and tell me why he has allowed so much pain and suffering in this world? Why did he allow me as a little boy to live my whole life wanting to be close to him and yet feeling so distanced? God just needs to come sit on this couch and tell me why he made the world this way."

For a long time I would try to come up with answers, "Well, that's not the way God works. He's already spoken through his son." ...all the things. But as a parent to watch my son struggle to want to be close. You know, Sheila, I don't have good answers for that. I don't have some pat formula as to why.

Sheila: Because it is a valid question.

Kay: It is a very valid question, that's why I couldn't say, "Oh you need to stop asking that question." All I could say was, "Buddy, I don't know but I'm sitting on the couch next to you. I'm sitting next to you and my arms are around you and I'll hold your hand. And together we'll ask God to answer those questions. I don't know."

Sheila: I think for me, one of the most devastating stories in the New Testament is John the Baptist in the beginning of Matthew 11 when he is sitting in prison and all he knows is that Messiah is supposed to be the one who comes and releases those who sit in prison

and Jesus is not coming. And he sends his disciples and says, "Will you ask Jesus, are you the one? Did I get it wrong?"

And it is when Jesus says, "Go back and tell John, the blind see, the lame..." But then this little phrase of "Blessed is he who is not offended by me." Will you love a God who doesn't live up to your expectations? Who doesn't answer prayer the way you want prayer answered? Will you worship when nothing makes sense?

Kay: Yeah. We prayed for Matthew to be healed. I had to deal with that myself, not only for Matthew's sorrow and struggle but our sorrow and struggle when he died. Because Sheila, we went out on a limb. We were so far out on that faith limb that God was going... I felt like God had given me a word. I'd done a fleece, the old Gideon fleece thing and I felt like God had given me a fleece that he was going to heal Matthew here.

And when Matthew died it was crushing. Not only just to lose my son but like John the Baptist, I felt that same thing. I'm sitting there, wait! You're the releaser of those behind bars. You're the freedom guy. Where was that for Matthew? And to struggle through and to understand as best I can.

I have a little mystery pot. I have this little pot where I throw all my questions. It is a little ceramic pot because there's questions that I don't know what to do with. I don't have good answers. What I do know is that I trust God with all that I am. I have more hope than I've ever had. But do I have God figured out? Not in the slightest. So all those questions of, why didn't he heal Matthew? Why didn't he answer Matthew's prayer in the way that Matthew prayed? Why didn't he let John the Baptist out of the prison? Why did he let him... I don't know! But they go in that mystery pot and I know that when I see Jesus face to face that those questions, as C.S. Lewis says, will die away in the presence of the answerer himself. I'm holding on to that.

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: Quite an interview. I can't imagine the kind of pain and suffering that Kay and Rick have walked through, and yet out of it! It's almost like when some kind of tragedy like that strikes your life, it's almost like God takes you by the shoulders and shakes. And everything that you thought mattered falls away, and all your left with is: do I still believe that you're god? And do I still believe that you are good, even though I do not understand.

For those of you who perhaps maybe that kind of rang a few warning bells as you watched. Maybe you've struggled with suicidal thoughts. Maybe you have someone in your family who you know is struggling with mental illness but doesn't quite know what to do. I cannot recommend Kay's website more highly: kaywarren.com She has all sorts of resources, she'll tell you how to get help if you need it for yourself. She'll show you how to get help for someone you love who maybe doesn't even want help.

There is so much on that website that instructs the church on how do we approach mental illness with faith. It's as if – sometimes I think as if God dropped Kay. It almost looked like she fell into a million pieces. But when he, in his loving way that only he can do, picked her up again, it's like his light shines so brilliantly through all those places. And her love her idea of having a little ceramic pot where you put all your questions.

And maybe that's where you are right now today. You're like, God, I don't understand anything that's going on in life at the moment. Why don't you do that? Why don't you get a little pot, write those questions down and put them in.

But also, one of the things that we care so passionately about here at life, are those who have very real questions right now, but it's not about mental health. It's not about things like that. It's about where am I going to find some water to give to my child, that would potentially kill them. I know Kay would join me in saying would you watch this, because we're going to show you how you and I together can make a difference. Watch this.

On the mission field:

Ralph: We're out here today in the middle of the country of Zambia. I was just told this morning that almost half the country has no access to clean water. I came across little Charity. Her family has dug a hole out here trying to find water. So I've asked her to come and show us the kind of water that they bring up. Bless their heart. They tried to dig a hole to find water -- and they have found water, but it sits stagnant day after day. And so I just want to see her bring it up.

So go ahead Charity, you can bring it up. She is a strong little girl, by the way -- really strong. She does this for her family. Go ahead and pour it into the bucket, Charity. This is the water they bring up from this well. Little Charity comes out here on a regular basis to fetch water for her family only to bring up contaminated water. It makes them sick, gives them diarrhea, cholera, all those things you hear about from drinking water just filled with bacteria. Mothers trying to get them feeling better, but they keep drinking the same contaminated water and it just keeps on making them sick.

It's just hard to believe that that's all the water they have to drink day after day. We need to drill as many wells as we can. Water like this is killing precious little children; that's bringing death when it should be bringing life.

End of video**In the studio:**

Sheila: I was actually on that trip with Ralph. I met that darling little girl. There's something inside you, just this instinct that wants to say no, no! Don't drink that. I almost felt guilty standing beside them. But it's all they have. And once Ralph and I left with our crew, that's where they were going every single day. Honestly, sometimes on these trips I feel like this real despair, like Lord, this is too much. What can we do?

But then I realize there's so much we can do. We've been doing our Water for Life now for a couple of weeks, but we still have 150 wells to drill. That can seem like a huge task

but when we do it together, when we all do something, it's actually really, really doable.

Do you know that for \$48 that will give clean drinking water for ten children, basically for their life. Because when we – they will dig and they will get maybe six feet down, but the water there is filthy and when it rains and there's animal feces, all sorts of stuff going into that well, the water is there. Clean water is there. But you have to drill so deep. So when we go in with our crew and we dig a well and clean water springs up, it changes the life of a whole village.

Some of you could do a little more than \$48. If you could do \$144, that will give 30 children clean water for the rest of their lives. If you're able to do a whole well, \$4,800 – and really, when you think about that, that's a well that will provide water for about 1,000 people for their lifetimes. That's why we call it Water for Life, because those wells will serve them for their life and give literally save the lives of a village. If you could do that, that would be just amazing.

But for those of you who think well, that's a little bit much. \$48 will give ten children water. We're going to be back there again and when we leave our partners there on the ground, it's with this promise that we will come home and we will tell their story. Some of you have helped so much before and I just want to say, on behalf of James and Betty and myself, I just want to say thank you, thank you, thank you. But the need is real, and it's there right now. We need to be able to go into new, some of the villages that Ralph and I were in, it was just heartbreaking to watch the number of women who came forward when we said, "How many of you have lost a child due to drinking contaminated water?" And one by one they stepped out of the crowd and came and joined us. It was overwhelming. So let's change that. Would you go online? Would you dial that number on your screen? Give the very best gift you can. Let's bring water for life.

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

In the studio:

Sheila: Thank you! Thank you so much. And for any gift at all, we will send you the

beautiful devotional, the Four Seasons Devotional. And for a gift of \$100 or more, we will send you the beautiful journal, and the space for you to write in, maybe you could use that, as Kay suggested, as a place where you ask your questions. And then you can go back and write a place where God gave you an answer.

Just remember, we're always here for you. We love you, we pray for you, we are grateful for you. But remember, the Lord is with you. And if you need some help, don't forget to go to kaywarren.com.

So, for everyone here at Life Outreach, let me just say God bless! And we'll see you next time!