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Week 42: Rescue Life

Sheila Walsh

"Drop Your Baggage"

Sheila: Hi! Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh and I'm so glad that you're joining me. Have you ever discovered just a huge box and it is full of photographs that you meant to organize? It was one of my favorite things. When I would go home to Scotland before my mom went home to be with Jesus, she had this great big box that was covered in Christmas paper and in it was just hundreds and hundreds of photographs. I would go through them all and some of them were of relatives that looked like they were born in Charles Dickens' time. But it was just so fun.

Well, I was doing something similar the other day. I was sorting through some photographs and I found some of an unusual thing, a snowy Christmas that we had here in Dallas a few years ago. That might be the norm where you live but it is rare for us. But I was looking at the photographs and I remembered the morning so clearly. I had the Disney Parade on television in the background and I began to cook our Christmas meal.

My husband Barry is a southern boy. His mom Eleanor had entrusted me with something that's really precious, her family recipes passed down from her mom. And after Eleanor died it became even more precious to me because in the book there are all the dishes that Barry grew up with like macaroni pie, sweet potato casserole, green bean casserole, collard greens, mashed potatoes, cornbread stuffing, and of course, the turkey.

Well, I'd just put the turkey into the oven when Christian cried out, "Mom look! It's snowing!" Well, we all ran into the yard to catch the first few flakes of winter snow. And at first, honestly, it wasn't much to look at. We thought that might be all we got. But over

the next few hours we were blanketed in a thick layer of powdery, sparkling wonderful. It was beautiful! In fact, at that point, we had two little white dogs and they ran out and disappeared. I had to keep looking for their breath.

Well, as the sun began to set and cast it's, you know that lovely rosy reflection on snow, I stopped for a moment to thank God for the unexpected gift of a winter storm.

But even as I was looking at the photographs, I thought, not all storms are beautiful or welcome. Over the last few years in America our nation has had more than its fair share of storms that have devastated communities. We have seen tornadoes wreak havoc, wild fires decimating beautiful land and destroying property. And then of course, the pandemic of 2020. We do our best to prepare for storms but some days they just catch us by surprise.

I think that is true in our personal lives as well. Who among us hasn't faced some devastating personal storm that we didn't see coming? It could be the loss of a job. It could be the loss of a loved one. It can be an unexpected health crisis. Just like those winter storms outside our door we don't always see them coming. Those of us who have committed our lives to following God are not exempt from life's storms.

I think of the words that Jesus spoke to his closest friends on the night when he was to be betrayed by one who had claimed to be one of his most loyal followers. And it's a verse I've turned to over and over. You'll find it in John 16, verse 33. Jesus said, *"Here on earth you're going to have many trials and sorrows but take heart for I've overcome the world."*

I take comfort in that truth, but I find myself asking what does it mean "to take heart"? How do we stand when everything around us seems to be falling? If you're like me, many of the storms you've faced are not outside your door, but inside your own heart. As women, we face many of the same issues.

Over the last 35 years I've had the privilege and the joy of travelling around the world

speaking to large and small gatherings of women. I love, love that! And my heart is always to transparently speak about the real issues in life that each one of us face. I believe that honesty has encouraged others to trust me with their own struggles. And through those years I've noticed a pattern. I've seen the same issues rear their heads time and time again. Whether I've been speaking here in America or in England, in Australia or Africa, I hear the same cry from the hearts of women. They speak of things like disappointment, shame, anger, fear, regret, heartache, insecurity, bitterness, unforgiveness, and at times that desperate feeling of being all alone. I think that's probably one of the hardest storms to face when we think we're all alone. Even those of us who are grateful for loving families around us still sometimes face many of the same struggles. You know you can actually feel alone in a crowd?

It was actually an event I was invited to speak at a couple of years ago that brought everything kind of into focus for me and gave me a fresh, a renewed passion and purpose for my life and what I knew God has called me to do. I was asked to speak to a large group of ministry wives. These women were pastors' wives, wives of worship leaders, and heads of various women's ministries who gather once a year in different cities to be encouraged by those who understand the peculiar strains and pressures of ministry life.

Well, my session was later in the morning and I arrived a little early and I slipped into the back of the hotel ball room as the morning general session for all the men and women was coming to a close. I remember it was really a beautiful moment. I stood in the dark and I drank in the power and the truth of words I've loved my whole life. They were singing, "Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father! There is no shadow of turning with thee. Thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not. As thou have been, thou will forever will be."

And the piano player stopped playing for the last chorus. It was just voices raised in worship. Honestly, it still gives me chill bumps. It was beautiful!

Well, they had assigned a girl to me to make sure I was in the right place at the right time.

So she tapped me on the shoulder saying it was time to go, I had about 20 minutes to set up and do a mike check. Well, the room for my session seated probably maybe 200 people and in front of the podium someone had placed a large simple wooden cross. I later discovered it was actually a gift for me since my office now is an ongoing reminder of what God did in that room that day.

So I just took the time I had, and I walked past each seat and said a brief prayer for the woman who would sit there and I put a four by six card and a pencil on each seat. My message that morning was on the power of telling the truth. My text was from Psalm 86, verse 11: *Teach me your ways, O Lord, that I may live according to your truth! Grant me purity of heart that I may honor you.*

I've been sitting with that verse for quite some time. Telling the whole truth is not something I've always found easy. And it is not that I made a habit of lying, I just withheld certain parts of my story because let's be honest, fear and shame don't have a lot of curb appeal in the church. But I'm a disciple of Paul in terms of my heart toward ministry. When he wrote his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, he said this: *"We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's good news but our own lives, too."*

I love that! So that is my personal template for ministry. I believe in communicating the power of the Word of God and the transparency of our own human story. So that's how I shared my message that day. I told the women that for years I had hidden behind the mask of ministry. Somehow praying that the work I did for God would somehow tip the scales in my favor and outweigh the shame and the fear that had stopped me for years. I told them that for the first 35 years of my life I didn't know there was another way to live. I didn't know that you could live free, loved, based not on our own good works or anything we bring to the table, but on the finished work of Christ.

Honestly, it took a crisis in my life to wake me up to this beautiful radical truth: We are loved right now as we are because of all Jesus has done. Do you get that? That right now

if you put your faith in Jesus you are loved on your best day and your worst day the same because of what Jesus has done. On the cross he cried out, "It is finished!" Bill paid in full.

Once I brought my message to an end that day, I explained why I placed the card on every seat. But first I asked them a question. And let me just ask you the same question. What would it look like right now if all your baggage became visible? Not your purse or your groceries but your internal baggage, the things we hide from one another? What would that look like for you? Sometimes when trauma happens when we're young or when we don't know how to process it, we just bury it, we just push it into the cellar of our soul, and we find a way to go on. Perhaps that's true of you. So let me ask you again: What would it look like if, wherever you're sitting right now, suddenly all that baggage became visible?

But then I asked a follow-up question and let me ask you the same question. If you saw how much stuff you have been dragging around with you every single day of your life, would you want to keep it? In the quietness that morning and now, I asked them and you, reflect on your life. On the things that are just honestly weighing you down. Then I asked them to pick up the cards and write down the things they no longer wanted to carry. I told them, "Don't put your name on it but just write down what you no longer want to carry." I reminded them of the glorious exchange that Christ has offered each one of us.

I'm sure you know this verse. It's actually the last two verses of Matthew Chapter 11:
"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I'm humble and gentle at heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

I love how those verses read in the Message Bible. Let this just wash over you: *"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with*

me -- watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

I love the fact that twice it is "you'll learn" -- it doesn't just happen in a moment. It is a daily discipline. I asked the ladies that morning, and I'll ask you, will you take just a few moments and let those words soak in? Sometimes we're so familiar with a text that we just let it kind of wash over us and we miss the awesome truth and the weight it contains. What we're being offered here is a beautiful exchange. Christ is saying to you, "If you find yourself at the end of yourself come to me. Drop all that baggage at my feet. I will give you what you were uniquely designed to carry and nothing more."

That morning then I pointed to the cross and I said, "Simply this is a moment between you and God. Don't put your name on the card, but if there is something you've been dragging around for years and you're tired of it, write it down and come lay it at the foot of the cross."

I watched as one by one they came. And they were women of all ages and stages of life. Some with tear-streaked faces. And one by one they placed their burden symbolically at the feet of Christ. And then the women moved on to the next session. But I knelt down, and I picked up each card. I took them home and I prayed over every single one. And honestly, I was kind of shocked. From that room of women who loved God and have walked with him for years, I read the same list of struggles that I've heard over the last 35 years. And these were not women new to the faith. These women were mature, had been involved in Christian ministry for years yet struggled with the very same issues as those who looked to them for guidance and hope.

I thought about that for a long, long time. Why do you think we hide our pain? Why do we hide our brokenness? I just want you to know right now you don't have to carry that baggage for one more day. Maybe you'll find a couple of moments today where you can find a card and you can write down, first ask the Holy Spirit, "Please show me what baggage have I been dragging through my life?" And write it down. And then maybe you

even want to take it outside and burn the card or just tear it into pieces and see it as been given to the Lord that you don't have to carry it.

I think church should be the one place on this planet where the minute you walk through the doors you get to show up exactly as you are. But often it's the least honest moment of our day. Sometimes you'll have a horrible argument with your husband or your wife on the way to church. You've called them things that are not in the New Testament! They may have been in the old, but they didn't make it into the new covenant. And then you walk through the doors and the greeter says, "How are you?" And you are like, "Oh if I was any closer to Jesus I'd be flying."

Here's the deal. These are not days to mess around with our faith. These are days to decide who we are and whose we are and live accordingly. But we can't show grace and mercy to others if we've never received it ourselves. I really encourage you, get rid of that baggage you've been carrying. It doesn't belong to you. Jesus took it on himself on the cross. You can lay that down and stand up knowing that the only label you should be wearing is "Child of the King."

That's your eternal identity so why wouldn't you just start living that way now? When we're in love with Jesus when we are free, that's so infectious to those around us. The world is watching right now. A lot of people are lost and angry and hopeless. Let's fulfill what Peter said in First Peter, "Always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within you." Let's live a life that raises questions in the lives of others.

One of the greatest privileges that you and I get is once we've laid our burdens down, we have the privilege of seeing some other people set free as well. Would you watch this?

On the mission field:

Sheila: Sex trafficking is the worst kind of prison I've ever seen. I've been in maximum

security prisons. I've talked to women on death row. There is a worse kind of prison than that and that's sex trafficking because it is pure evil.

Open captions:

>> I was blindfolded and locked inside a room. A guard at the door brought in many men every night.

>> The men make me take drugs. If I don't do what they want I will get beaten.

>> They said, "We have no problem in killing you. We have done it many times. We will kill you and throw you out of the window. There will be no help for you."

Sheila: We will rise up and we will change this, and we will do it because -- our whole thing here at *LIFE* is reach, rescue, restore. Reach her and let her know, hey! There is a better way for you to live your life. You don't have to do this. Rescue -- go into these horrible bars and clubs and brothels and rescue these girls. And then restore them; bring them to a place where they can learn their value in Christ. The value that God places on their life is not diminished by what they have to do every night. And because of that we get to tell them you're not a number. We will step in. We will say, "Let us be your spiritual mom and dad much let us be your big sister in Christ. Let us be the ones who come and fight for you because you are worth fighting for."

End of video

In the studio:

Sheila: There is some evil and heartache in this world that is situational. You happen to be born in a country where there is very little money, where the crops fail, where there is not enough rain, where there is no clean water. But there are situations where it is pure evil. The heartache and the pain and the agony, I believe comes straight from the pit of hell.

Trafficking is one of the greatest evils on this earth. And having been there, having walked through those streets, having sat and talked with these girls -- and they're just little girls! It's not like some mature woman who has decided this is what she wants to do; although frankly, I don't believe any woman on this earth ever thinks this is what I'd like to do with my life. These are just little children! And so often you'll talk to girls and they might be like 12 or 13 and they have been kidnapped and they wake up and they discover themselves besides some man. And you might be tempted to think, then why don't they just leave? Well, for a couple of really good reasons.

These people who hold these girls are brutal. One girl showed us the marks on her back where she had been hit with a cord. Reason number two is even more heartbreaking. One girl said to us, "Well, they've told me they know where I live, and I have younger sisters. And they have said if I ever try and escape, they will go after them." That is wrong!

I want to read you something from Psalm 82. It says this: *Rescue the poor and helpless. Deliver them from the grasp of evil people.*

It doesn't get much more clear than that. From the Word of God, "Rescue the poor and helpless. Deliver them from the grasp of evil people." Traffickers are very well organized and very well-funded; and we have to, in the name of Jesus, be as organized and as funded. So I'm asking you today, this mission is so close to my heart because I love when we do mission feeding, I love when we put wells in. I love that! It's so important! But this is a situation where young girls have been captured by evil, and in the name of Jesus we need to go in and reach them in the villages before anyone ever gets to them, rescue them when they've ended up in a brothel, and restore them.

But we need your help. We can't do it by ourselves. But we have some amazing friends who at the moment have put up \$250,000 as a matching gift. It used to be it takes well, it still does, takes \$128 to reach, to rescue or to restore a child. But because of the matching gift, now for \$64 that will be combined, and you will reach, rescue, and restore. We need

your help. Even as I'm speaking girls are being trafficked. Even as I'm speaking, girls are waking up in a place that's so far from home. We are the body of Christ on the planet at this moment and we need to go in there. God is a warrior king. He is not just a gentle shepherd. He is a warrior king and we want to stand up to this evil. So please! Call the number on your screen. Give the best gift you can. Thank you!

Begin video clip

Announcer: Behind the bright lights there is a darkness where a world of innocence is lost, and abuse runs rampant scarring the souls of children with no one and nowhere to turn for help. With bodies broken and hopes crushed, these young victims are trapped in a never-ending nightmare.

Today you can shine the light of God's love in this dark world to reach, rescue, and restore these young ones to the life God designed for them to live. With a generous \$250,000 matching gift now your gift of \$128 to help reach, rescue, or restore one child can be doubled to help two children. Your \$64 gift will be matched to help save one child from the horrors of human trafficking. And a \$32 mission rescue gift will be doubled to \$64.

With your gift we'll send you *Natural Remedies*. This beautifully illustrated and essential book explores ancient nutrition and the health benefits found in God's creation, a valuable reference with biblical insight to help you live your best life.

With your gift of \$128 or more, you'll receive this beautiful prayer box inscribed with the words from Philippians 4:6. This wonderful keepsake includes pencil and paper to write down prayer requests you want to give to God.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280 which will now help rescue 20 children. 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:

Sheila: The situation here, you can probably tell by my circumstances, there was abject poverty. The people who are using and trafficking these little girls are very organized, they're very well-financed. They know what they're doing. I asked one of the girls, have you thought of just trying to escape? Their thing is, if I try and escape, they will come up to my parents because my parents are so poor. My parents are desperate. They have no money. So I'm forced into this life.

But you and I can do something. So what I'm asking you to do, would you let these little girls here who think nobody cares about them know there is a God in heaven who knows their name and who loves them. But he has a people who are committed to reaching out. So please, go to your phone, go online, make the very best gift possible and let's bring life to these trapped beautiful little girls.

In the studio:

Sheila: Thank you so much! This mission is so on my heart. These girls are waiting right now. Nobody else is coming to rescue them. We come in the name of Jesus and we say, "No more!"

So if the line was busy, and I hope it was, keep calling, write it down, call, let's just bombard the gates of hell where girls are standing and bring them into the kingdom of God.

Thank you so much and I'll see you next time!