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Week nine: WFL

Sheila Walsh

Purpose in Suffering

SHEILA: Hi! Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh. I wanted to take a moment today just to thank you for the number of you who not only support all of the ministries here, but you let us know that you're praying for us. I read all your comments on Facebook. You can either do that at *LIFE Today* Facebook page or mine is Sheila Walsh Connects.

But I read your questions and I get a lot of questions from people really wanting to understand more about suffering. Doesn't sound like the most upbeat program you're about to experience but I think it will be. I want you to hang with me because there is something tremendous that God is doing in the midst of things that don't make sense.

But I wrote down some of the questions like why does God allow suffering? I mean if he is able to stop it, why does he allow it? Somebody else said, "Does suffering mean that God doesn't hear my prayers?" Or does suffering mean that God loves me less than others who don't seem to suffer as much? But one of the questions I got a lot is, is there a purpose? What's the purpose in suffering?

I mean all of these are great questions and I don't pretend to know all the answers, but I've learned a lot in just the last month from reading First Peter. Peter is writing to Christians who are suffering. It was actually before widespread persecution of believers, but it was a time where those who were scattered in what is called, it is now modern-day Turkey; that's who Peter is writing to, the believers who are scattered in modern day Turkey but they're being abused verbally and discriminated against for their faith. In

many ways not unlike today.

It is quite possible that some were suffering literally physical abuse because of their faith and Peter writes to that very thing to encourage them and to remind them that because of Jesus, in the end we always win. But he had so much more to say. I wanted to unpack one particular verse today. Let's lean in and listen to what Peter was sharing with our brothers and sisters so many years ago scattered around who believed in Jesus.

So First Peter 5:10 he writes this: "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast."

Well, I have lots of commentaries that I love to dive deep into when I'm studying but I learned a lot about this text from William Barclay's commentary. He was a Scottish theologian. He has a great commentary on Peter's first letter. This really encouraged me a lot and that's my prayer today, that it will do the same for you.

Every one of the words that Peter uses in this text has behind it a very vivid picture. Each tells us something about what suffering is designed by God to do for a believer. So let's look at number one. First, we read that through suffering God will restore. Restore a man or woman. Now the word for "restore" is kind of difficult to translate. My pronunciation of Greek words is terrible, but it is "katarizein". And the word is, the word is what you would use for setting a fracture, like a broken bone. It is actually also used in Mark 1:19 for mending nets. It means to supply that which is missing; to mend that which is broken. So suffering, if accepted in humility and trust and love can repair what is broken in us when we surrendered it to Christ.

It's like I think of the last words that we have recorded of Joseph where he says, "The enemy intended this for evil, but God intended it for good." I believe with all my heart that it is a beautiful thing that God will do with a broken life if we give him all the pieces. God wants whatever your brokenness has been, God wants to restore, he wants to do a

work of restoration in you, a mending. I read somewhere that Sir Edward Elgar, I don't know if you're familiar with him, he was a beloved English composer best known for his orchestral works, orchestral works including the Enigma Variations for those of you who are into all that. But also, the pomp and circumstance marches which so often you hear played at high school graduations. I wept the whole way through my son's.

But he was once listening to a young girl singing a solo from one of his own works. She had a voice like an angel, of incredible purity and clarity and range, and an almost perfect technique. But this was interesting, when she'd finished, Sir Edward said softly, "She will be really great when something happens to break her heart." Wow!

J.M. Barry who is the author of Peter Pan, he tells a story about how his mother lost her favorite son. And then he said this, "That's where my mother got her soft eyes. And that's why other mothers ran to her when they lost a child." Suffering had done something for her that an easy way could never have done. Suffering is meant by God to add like the grace notes to life, to make us more fully human. To restore the kind of hearts that God wants his children to have.

So let me just pause here and ask you, have you walked through a time where you've experienced something that you thought was going to break you? I want you to consider offering that whole experience to the Lord because God is a redeemer, he is a restorer and a redeemer, and he can use you. If you've walked through things I've never walked through, God can use you in ways he can never use me. God wants to restore, to mend that broken place.

Well, second thing that Peter tells us about suffering is that through suffering God will establish us. Well, the word for "*establish*" is "*sterixein*" which means to make as solid as granite. I grew up in Scotland with a lot of granite buildings. It is one of the strongest stones there is. Let me just give you an example, a kind of common example of the hardness of granite. It can be seen in the fact that a knife blade will not even scratch the surface of a granite countertop.

Suffering will do one of two things to us. It will either make us give up and walk away from our faith but when we invite Christ into our pain, he will strengthen us inside in a way that nothing else could. If we face pain and suffering with a continuing committed trust in Christ, scripture tells us we will emerge like steel that's been tempered in a fire.

Well, the third word that Peter uses, third through suffering God will strengthen us. The Greek is “sthenoun”, which means, the literal translation is to fill up with strength. Here’s the same sense again. A life with no effort, no discipline, almost inevitably becomes a flabby life. I don't think any of us really know what our faith means to us until it has been tried in the furnace of affliction. There is something doubly precious about a faith which has come victoriously through pain and sorrow and disappointment. A wind will extinguish a weak flame, but it will fan a strong flame into a still greater blaze. And so it is with faith.

The final word that's used here, "Through suffering, God will settle us – ‘settle’ us.” The Greek word is “themelioun”, which means to lay the foundations. When we have to make sorrow and suffering, you'll notice in your own life, it drives you down to the very bedrock of your faith. It is then that we discover what are the things that cannot be shaken. It is in a time of trial that we discover the great truths on which real life is founded. When you have walked through suffering and you've kept your eyes focused on Christ, you are planted on a firm, firm foundation.

When I was thinking about that, about it settling, a firm foundation, I thought about to this great hymn we used to sing in our little Ayr Baptist Church on the West Coast of Scotland: How firm a foundation. I don't know whether you're familiar with that one but actually, I know all the words to it. So sit back and just listen to the words of this great hymn.

How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
It's laid for your faith in his excellent word!

What more can he say than to you he has said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?
Fear not, I am with you; be not dismayed.
For I am your God and will still give you aid.
I'll strength you, help you, and cause you to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.
When through the deep waters I call you to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow
For I will be with you, your troubles to bless,
And sanctify to you the deepest distress.
When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be your supply.
The flames shall not hurt you; I only design
Your dross to consume, and your gold to refine."

And then this. I love this verse!

The soul that on Jesus still leans for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes.
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"

I did a little research last night and no one is quite sure who wrote those lyrics, but I want you to know it's brought strength to many throughout the years. It was sung frequently in both the north and the south before the Civil War. It was a favorite hymn of Theodore Roosevelt. And Andrew Jackson requested it be sung at his deathbed. Robert E. Lee asked it to be sung at his funeral.

See, the thing is, the enemy intends that suffering will break us, make us question God's love for us. But if we will turn to Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to do his work in us, we're going to come through like gold, refined in a fire. God wants to take you to a place

where darkness no longer feels quite so dark. But it never comes easily.

A pastor friend of mine has been on a very dark and difficult journey for the last few years. His darling daughter has been battling brain cancer. He's told me that the fire he's walking through has burned away any easily worn sentiment from his soul. But in its place, there's a fierce love for Christ and a deep well of gratitude for the grace that they've known as a family. Suffering changes you. It changes how you understand faith, how you see others. It gives a greater understanding of what Christ suffered for you and me.

Remember the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*? Just as Toto tore away the drape revealing the Great Oz as nothing more than a scared little man, many of us feel disturbed when tragedy tears away the veneer of a comfortable faith. But it seems to me that when that drape disappears, you and I discover, unlike Dorothy and her traveling companions that behind our pretty picture of a comfortable God roars a lion whose fierce love burns with more intensity and magnificence than anything we could ever imagine.

I just want to speak to any of you today who feel as if God has abandoned you. You came to faith and you believed that once you placed your faith in Jesus life would go smoothly and you don't understand why things seem to be going so badly. And so often, that can make you doubt the love of God. But God is doing something magnificent in you.

I read a story about Amy Carmichael and I love this. She was watching with her children a goldsmith and he would take a piece of very rough gold, it didn't look at all like gold and put it in a fire and take it out and then kind of dust it off and put it back in and take it out. The process seemed to go on for a long time. And eventually she said to the man who was working with it, "When do you know that you're finished with it?"

He turned and said to her, "When I can see my face in it."

I love that! Do you know that's what Jesus is doing in you and me? He is refining us. He

is polishing us until he can see his face in us. That's the whole purpose of my life is to become more like Jesus. That's why we're here. But I just want to ask you, if you find yourself in a place right now that's a hard place, I've been reading some of your letters and some of the things you've gone through. Two or three people wrote to me about the fact that during the whole pandemic of 2020 that they lost their marriages and some lost jobs. A lot of people lost hope because everything seemed to shift. And in times like that, it is very tempting to think, God, where are you? Do you see what's happening in my life?

I want you to know that God is with you. He has promised, we read that in Philippians to complete the work that he began in you. It was Christ that called us to himself and he is the one who has committed himself to completing that work. God is a great redeemer and whatever you are going through, when you offer it to him, he can use it in ways that are unimaginable.

I'm thinking about my pastor friend and his daughter. I actually heard him preach long before his darling girl got cancer. He was a great preacher. He could take passages of scripture and open them up. But I have to tell you, once he had been in this crucible of suffering, something had changed. There was a depth of spiritual understanding because all of the stuff that doesn't matter fell away. And what he was left with, what he is left with is the conviction that God is good, that God is committed to us, that he has promised to take us through. He's absolutely convinced how firm a foundation our God is.

So I just want you to know, now you see a few of us on camera, you'll see James and Betty, Randy, myself, but there is a whole staff here at *LIFE* who pray for you, who are grateful for you. But I just want you to take a couple of moments and whatever it is that you've been walking through that seems pointless, I just want to ask you to invite Christ to be with you in that place so that after you have suffered for a little while, but in the midst of your suffering Christ is with you. You are loved. You are seen. You are known. And there is something about being given fresh eyes to see that changes us. We can hear that things are happening on the other side of the world but our passionate commitment here at *LIFE* is to take you with us. To take you with us and show you what it looks like

to be able to respond to a need right now. You and I can do this. Would you watch this?

On the mission field:

[WEEPING]

Open Captions:

>> The doctors couldn't do anything for my baby. I took him home, but he was too sick. He died that night. My baby needed water to drink. If I weren't poor, he would still be alive.

ANNOUNCER: The tears Naylor sheds are so typical of mothers in developing countries that lost children because the only water available to them is disease-ridden, and so oftentimes deadly. Our mission team's hearts are invariably broken hearing these mothers' stories. Tammy Trent while offering Naylor all she could at the time, the touch of human compassion, knew there was much more that was needed to give Naylor hope for the future.

TAMMY: I need a savior. I need a rescuer. I don't want you to feel hopeless. I don't want you to feel afraid. I don't want you to feel those things, except really believe that there are people that want to help her. I really believe that. So I think this is our opportunity to help to do something for you and for so many other people.

Clean water, it's something we take for granted every day. I know I do. I think if we pull together, we'd be able to say that things are about to change. But I need your help. We can come in here and drill a well, we could change everything so let's not wait. Let's actually do something about it today. Please!

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Gosh, what a thought! What a thing for a mother to have to say, "If I wasn't so

poor, my child would have lived." That's devastating! "If I wasn't so poor, if I didn't live in such poor circumstances, my child would have lived." That's something that... we hear those cries here at *LIFE* and we're committed to making a difference.

What we want to do this year with your help is to drill 350 new wells in over 20 nations. To have the privilege of walking in some of these places, every time that we're there, I feel like you're there with me. That we get to walk there together. But I've seen--I've seen what happens when we do nothing, and I've seen what happens when we do help and put in a well.

One particular trip, within three days I saw the whole picture. We were in villages where the people, the water was absolutely filthy, but it was the only thing they had. I can't imagine how desperate that must make you. If you're a mom or a dad or... you'll understand that when your child is sick or potentially going to get sick, you'll do whatever to get help for them. But what about if you live in an area where there is nothing you can do? No matter how far you walk, no matter what you did, there is nothing else but this filthy contaminated water.

But then just two days later we got to drive into an area and honestly, I know it sounds kind of crazy, but it was the first time I'd seen a well with the name, "Given by partners of *LIFE Outreach International!*" I did a happy dance all around the well. It was so amazing to get to see it with my eyes, and to watch. We sat there and we watched as the children in the village came and got all the water they needed for that day. Pure, unadulterated joy.

So that's what we want to do a lot more this year. We want to drill 350 wells. Here's how we can break it down so that every one of us can do something. Could you give \$48? Do you know if you can give \$48 that will actually give clean drinking water for ten people for the rest of their lives--for \$48! If you could give \$144 that will give clean drinking water for 30 people. And if you're able, perhaps you have a business or you're in a great Sunday School class and you want to do a project together, do you know that \$4800 will

drill a whole well in a village that will give clean water to roughly 1,000 people! We call it Water for LIFE because that's how long the well will last.

What a privilege to get to do that in Jesus' name! We want to do more this year. We were able to do a lot in 2020 and I'm grateful but we need you now. Would you please just go to your phone, call that number on your screen, and give the very best gift you can.

Together, you and I can change the world for so many mothers who should not have to cry over losing one more child. Please call. Thank you!

Begin video clip:

Announcer: Dirty disease-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 poverty, this is their only choice.

But 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 350 water wells this year. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five children. A gift of \$48 will help provide ten. \$72 will provide for 15. And \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime.

With your gift, we'll send you *Speak Your Name* devotions and declarations on the reality of Jesus. Filled with stunning imagery, these 40 encouraging devotions by Laney Rene serve as a reminder of the power of Jesus' name.

With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the "Be Refreshed" pitcher. This beautiful ceramic pitcher is decorated with Proverbs 11:25 and is sure to make a lovely addition to your table or home.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well. And you may request our brand-new, inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Thank you so much! If you've tried to get through and it's been busy, please persevere. We're going to make such--I really believe this year at *LIFE* we're going to make such a difference. Wouldn't it be amazing if we exceeded our goal? So please, just do what you can. For any gift at all, we'll send you Laney Rene's beautiful devotional, *Speak Your Name*; Devotions and declarations on the reality of Jesus. For \$100 we'll send you the "Be Refreshed" pitcher. And if you're able to give \$1200, this gorgeous bronze. It's called, "Divine Servant."

So thank you so much for making a difference. You did it last year and we're believing you're going to do it this year. So for all of us here at *LIFE Today*, I'm Sheila Walsh saying thanks for being with us. God bless you. We'll see you soon.