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Week 21: Spring Mission Feeding

Sheila Walsh

"Start Where You Are"

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh. One of the rich gifts that the year 2020 gave to me in the midst of everything that was not good and everything that it took away from so many people was it brought me to a fresh understanding of the power of prayer. I was brought up in a small Baptist church in the West Coast of Scotland and I saw prayer as something that you do as a believer.

But during that year of everything shifting and changing, I just got this fresh perspective from the Holy Spirit that prayer is who we are; that we get to have conversations with the Lord all the time. And not all the conversations have to be about thanksgiving or gratitude, although that is really important, you get to come to God as you really, really are.

Let me read you a C.S. Lewis quote I read recently that really resonated: "Mental pain is less dramatic than physical pain, but it is more common and harder to bear. The frequent attempt to conceal mental pain increases the burden. It is easier to say, 'My tooth is aching' than to say, 'My heart is broken.'"

But God wants us to come in all the moments, no matter what is going on. Prayer is a gift to you and I to live in this world where so much is not fair. But you don't have to clean yourself up to come to your Father. You actually get to come as you are. Would you watch this?

Begin video clip:

Open Captions: Praying women.

Session one: Start where you are. Our prayer to God: Help me!

SHEILA: Hi! And welcome to the *Praying Women* eight-week Bible study. Over the next eight weeks we're going to study the truth that prayer is one of the most powerful, life-changing things we will ever do. Yet we often struggle. And sometimes, the answers feel few and far between. But here's the good news. There is a simple, powerful way to reignite your conversation with God.

We're going to learn from God's word how to:

1. Press through when heaven seems silent.
2. Use prayer as a powerful weapon in the midst of struggle.
3. Pray as joy-filled warriors, not anxious warriors.
4. How to let go of the past and stand on God's promises for you right now. It's time to start again.

Help me! Those were the words I cried out in pain when I had come to the end of myself. I'd spent so many years trying to be the perfect Christian woman, to never fail God. Yet here I was on the floor in a small room in a psychiatric hospital feeling honestly as if my life was over. That was over 25 years ago. What I would go on to discover is that when we are at the end of who we are, we're just at the beginning of who God is.

Starting where you are right now may feel like you're hopeless, it might feel impossible, but I want you to know when you invite God into that space you will see that it is actually an open door into all God has for you. Are you, are you in a help-me place right now? You're so overwhelmed that the only prayer you can muster up is, Lord, please help me!

Even when it can feel more like throwing up a white flag of surrender than a genuine cry for help, I mean let's face it, we're stretched so thin these days that prayer is often the last few words we utter before falling exhausted into bed. We want to spend more time in prayer during the day but our to-do list, if it is anything like mine, gets longer every

week. And let's be honest, life is stressful. To be alive today is to be very well-acquainted with stress.

Now there is good stress like welcoming a new child or moving into a new home or new job but when most of us hear the word *stress* it's not the joy-filled kind that comes to mind, it's the overwhelming, soul-crushing kind. Let me list just a few of these and see which ones you most relate to. Work-related pressure to deal with. There are, one of the worst, financial concerns to manage. Relationships always provide opportunities for stress to rear its ugly head. Or perhaps you have chronic health concerns. Or maybe family issues seem just absolutely overwhelming.

Here's the truth of the matter. It is one thing to understand in our minds that we have a loving heavenly Father who doesn't simply tolerate our request for help but longs to come to our aid. It is quite another to just instinctively turn to him in our distress and trust him to lead us to higher ground. And yet, that's precisely what he stands ready to do right now for you.

In Psalm 34 we see a powerful progression play out. David wrote: *I prayed to the Lord and he answered me. He freed me from all my fears. Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces. In my desperation I prayed, and the Lord listened; he saved me from all my troubles. For the angel of the Lord is a guard; he surrounds and defends all who fear him. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Oh the joys of those who take refuge in him. The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles.*

And then one of my favorite verses: *The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.*

In response to the Psalmist's prayer for help, God answered the pray-er, freed the pray-er from all fears--everything David was afraid of. And what David made clear in that Psalm is: *The Lord saves, he defends, and he rescues.*

What wonderful promises lie in this one passage alone. We can turn to God in prayer knowing that he will hear us, that he will help us, and that he will sustain us day by day.

One of Satan's greatest achievements in the lives of believers is convincing you and me that God doesn't want to help us in our time of need. That is a lie from the pit of hell to come against one of the foremost promises of our Heavenly Father that he will never fail us and will never abandon us. God has promised to go ahead of us, to stand with us, to hem us in behind and before and to never leave our side. God has promised always to generously listen to us when we call.

This is the truth: *God is near. God longs to hear from us. God loves to help us in our time of need.*

We don't have to give into despair wondering how we're going to make it through this raging storm. We only have to pause, look up from our circumstances and pray one single word to him, help! That's it! Help! We start where we are when it comes to prayer, and so much of the time where we are is desperate in need of help.

Here's an opportunity for reflection. In Psalm 34 we come across nine actions that God takes in response to those who pray to him. The first one is this: He answers them. Would you take a few moments later when you have some time to read Psalm 34 and write down in a journal or a piece of paper the remaining eight actions that God takes in response to those who come to him as they are, honestly, it's one of my favorite Psalms and those actions that God performs are amazing.

David described those in need of God's aid as brokenhearted. The Hebrew root of this word is shabar. And its meanings include: *To burst, to destroy, to shatter, to shiver, to hurt, to break into pieces by crushing, to break down, to break off, to break up, to bring to the birth.*

Let me ask you, where in your life today do things feel shattered, broken down, brought back to their birth, brought back actually to the place where you first experienced this pain? Based on whatever challenging situation you might be facing right now, which of the nine actions of God seems the most necessary or the most relevant to you right at this moment? For me, honestly, it is the beautiful truth, "I prayed, and the Lord listened."

Just think about it. Don't we all long to be listened to? So let me ask you, what about you? Could you identify what your greatest need is right now? Just knowing that God longs to listen to us, to free us from our fears, to surround us and defend us and rescue us from every trouble then we who love God should be jumping at the opportunity to take our troubles right to him shamelessly and enthusiastically. When you struggle to pray in this manner, what has the source of your struggle been? Let me just suggest a few things that might be holding you back: *Not knowing what to say. Not believing that God wants to hear from you. Trouble focusing because of busyness or fear. Perhaps lack of faith that God will respond.* It might be something else entirely, but the truth is that God knows we're going to struggle so he has specifically given us promises that we can stand on.

Let me share just a few of these powerful promises that you can apply to whatever you're struggle with right now. Psalm 91, verse 15 says this: *When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them.*

Did you hear that? Not "I might" or "If they've been good that week." No, "I will!"

In John 14:27 Jesus says this: *I am leaving you with a gift--peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.*

When you're struggling to find the right words, we have this amazing promise from Romans 8:26 and 27. Listen to this: *And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for, but the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with*

God's own will.

Isn't that amazing? But when you are literally on your face on the floor, when you can't form a sentence, when you just don't know, it is more like a groan from your spirit the Holy Spirit, God, the Holy Spirit is praying for you. Not just for your past or for whoever you look up to in the faith--you! Whether you've known God for years or you found him last night. This is the relationship we're promised.

In first John Chapter 5 we read: *I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life. And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him.*

I love this! This is part of the conversation Jesus had with his closest friends on the evening that he knew he was about to be betrayed, go through a mockery of a trial, and a devastating execution. But Jesus said this. He calls us in John 15:15 by a very intimate name: *"I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, I have told you everything the Father told me."*

Do you see the important implication tucked inside this verse? "A master doesn't confide in his slaves," Jesus said. The implication being that a master *does* confide in his friends. Our master confides in us. Isn't that an amazing thing to think about? When we're overwhelmed by life we can go to Jesus and he will not only hear us and comfort us and respond to us but also confide in us as a dear friend whispering truths that we need in that moment. Jesus is prepared to confide in us if only we will come and be still and ask for the help we need.

Help me! What a powerful two-word prayer. When a parent hears these words from their child the first instinct is to immediately jump in and help. The truth of the matter is that our Heavenly Father feels the very same way, but in every moment, every day, all the time. "Yes, child," he says to you, "come to me with your need. Yes! Come! Yes, you. Yes, now."

When you have a relationship with Jesus, prayer isn't something you do; it's who you are.
And when we start to grasp just how eager our Lord is to help us, we will instinctively, it will be the first thing we think to do joyfully, always desire to live as women who pray.
Let me pray for you.

Father, I want to thank you that you invite us to come as we are. And Jesus, I want to thank you that you call us "friends," the kind of friends that you would confide in. And Holy Spirit, thank you so much that when we don't have words you pray for us. I ask right now for your grace and your mercy and your peace to rest on every single one hearing these words. Teach us to be more like Jesus, in his precious name. Amen.

In the studio:

SHEILA: What a joy to be a praying woman. And if you're a guy watching this, what a joy to be a praying man. If we only could begin to grasp how much we are loved by God, that we're welcomed into his presence, that he wants you to come to him all the time. And sometimes, one of the most powerful prayers is simply help me!

Honestly, my life falling apart was God's mercy to me because in the ashes of what was I discovered what I'd longed for all my life, a relationship with Jesus based on nothing I bring to the table. Like that great old hymn, "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling."

I don't know whether you're 15 or 95 but if you have a pulse, if there is not a white chalk mark around your body, it is not too late to begin this radical relationship with God. And it starts with intimate conversation. If you're angry you get to be angry. If you're sad, you get to be sad. To the level that you're willing to be honest with God is an indication of how much you trust him.

I would love to put this book *Praying Women* into your hands. What I'd like to ask you to do is there is some mothers around the world at the moment, many of them in Africa who are very much on our hearts here at *LIFE Today*. There is something going on that we want to talk to you about. It is really a drastic situation. Prayer changes things! But also, prayer changes us and one of the ways that prayer changes us is that we see people differently; not as causes to be saved but as people to be loved. So I want you to watch this and then I'll tell you how you can get your own copy of this book. Watch this.

On the mission field:

ANNOUNCER: These mothers are working hard. Struggling each day. They try to grow food for their families with little success. Not from lack of work. Not because they don't love their children. But because they just don't have adequate resources.

Ongoing drought in Angola and record-breaking floods in South Sudan have made it almost impossible to grow the food their families need. In South Sudan, mothers are forced to rely on feeding their children leaves from trees. Angolan mothers will forage for pods from the baobab trees. At best, the children can relieve their aching stomachs when they eat from the pods. But they receive little or no nutritional value.

Unfortunately, as hard as these mothers struggle to keep their children alive, a small grave is where the story ends too many times.

SHEILA: In January, this mother had to attend a third funeral for her children. I asked her, "On any given day, what is your number one concern?" And it is one thing: Getting food for these children. That's all she thinks about--every single day morning, noon, and night. All she thinks about is where can I get something to feed these children today? And she said many times she has to put these two to bed hungry and she tries to encourage them. You know what she says to them? "Who knows what tomorrow will bring?" She is trying to keep hope alive.

Mission feeding saves lives! We've done it before, but the need has never been greater. We need your help today. We need your help now.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: The sad truth is unless you and I determine to step into that gap, her hope of who knows what tomorrow will bring will be the same as yesterday and the day before and the day before. The situation at the moment in Africa is drastic. They've always had struggles but it's just this historic, unprecedented thing that's going on in the continent at the moment where in the south, in Angola, where that lovely mother Paulette is with those two precious children, the drought is, I mean there is nothing. Those pods that she was feeding her two, all they do is put a little fiber into their tummies. There is no nutrition. There's no protein, there is nothing that will build them up to be able to resist any kind of disease.

And then you fly just a little north to South Sudan and historic flooding has meant that the crops are completely destroyed. Not only that, 16 of our malnutrition clinics have been washed away. When we heard that, we were devastated because that's the last hope for so many of these mothers whose children are desperately sick.

Let me read you what I read this morning in my own devotions. This is from Isaiah Chapter 58 verse seven: *Share your food with the hungry and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them. Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the Lord will answer, "Yes, I am here," he will quickly reply.*

Verse ten: "Feed the hungry and help those in trouble."

They are in trouble at the moment. Let's respond to the written Word of God and

prompting of the Holy Spirit inside anyone who loves and believes in Jesus Christ. They need help and they don't need it tomorrow, they need it right now. \$30--\$30 will provide food for three children for three whole months. \$50 will feed five children for three months. \$100 will feed ten children.

And for any gift at all I will be honored to send you my book, *Praying Women*, how to pray when you don't know what to say. But would you consider giving an extra gift? We want to rebuild these 16 malnutrition clinics that were literally washed away. So to be able to put each one in place it's going to cost about \$392,000 to build all 16 clinics back in place with the beds, with the medication, with the help, with the staff. It is an urgent need. And here's a joy--you and I get to meet it.

Please go to your phone. Would you give the very best gift you've ever given? Let's respond in Jesus' name now.

On the mission field:

Announcer: Across the continent of Africa, children are suffering facing severe malnutrition and even death. With food reserves gone and many areas experiencing severe famine, we urgently need to replenish supplies to keep feeding the 350,000 children who are counting on us.

Call now with your life-saving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 to help feed and care for three, five or ten children for three full months. Also, please consider an extra gift to help immediately rebuild malnutrition clinics destroyed by record flooding in South Sudan. The urgent need is \$392,000 above our normal feeding budget and is critical to help save the lives of those who are suffering most.

With your gift of any amount we will send you "It is Well" Quiet Time Bundle featuring an instrumental music CD with 12 classic hymns and a 31-day prayer booklet to help renew your soul.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "No Greater Love" framed print. This portrait is a reminder of our Savior's love and the price that was paid for our salvation.

Finally with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children be sure to request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant." Please call, write, or make your gift online today!

End of video

On the mission field:

ISAK: You can see here how our staff are actually busy measuring the arm circumference of these children. So what they do is measure their arm circumference, they measure their height, they measure their weight and then they gauge that against the age of the child. Because for many of these children, they're suffering from severe malnutrition. And the shocking thing is we find children in this area that literally are five, six, seven, eight years old and yet they are the weight and the size of a child half their age.

This is a crisis and crisis require a massive action. That's what I'm asking you today, to give a massive action--an action of life. Lifesaving by providing food to these children, to their mothers, to this village that so desperately needs it.

In the studio:

SHEILA: You can see the need is great. But isn't it amazing that we get the privilege of being the answer to their prayers? This isn't a thing that we want to be guilted into doing. This is the joy of being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ on the earth to those who are praying for help right now.

For any gift at all, please request a copy of my book, *Praying Women*. It would an honor to send that to you. If you haven't called yet, please call. Let's just decide that for this month we're going to give up something that we don't really need to give those something that they desperately need.

So please, go to your phone, make the best gift you can. And remember, we're here for you too. If you need prayer, we've got you. So for all of us here at *LIFE Today*, I'm Sheila Walsh, we'll see you next time.