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Week 22: Spring Mission Feeding

Sheila Walsh

"The Practice of Persistence"

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh. Let me ask you a question. Do you ever get tired of praying because you think God's not listening? I was at San Diego a few weeks ago speaking to high school students and I took the opportunity, as well as speaking to them, to do a little bit of a Q and A with some of them and asked them about different subjects. One of the first things I asked them was: do you struggle to pray? And if you do, why do you struggle?

They were great. They were just honest kids and some of them said, "I get bored. I feel like I'm just repeating myself. I just say the same things over and over, 'Please help me pass my exams.' And that's kind of it."

Or somebody said, "If God already knows what he is going to do, why I would bother praying about it?"

But the one that really got me was a young girl. She kind of waited until the crowd had dissipated and it was just she and I. She said, "I don't pray anymore."

I asked her why.

She said, "Because when my grandmother got really sick," She said, "I'm very close to my grandmother. Sometimes my mom and dad have arguments and I can just slip over to my grandmother's house and I always feel safe there. When she got sick, I begged God not to take her. And she died. So I just think, why would I bother praying anymore?"

I totally understood the pain of that. And if anyone ever tries to tell you that they understand everything about God, I would question them because God's ways are higher than our ways. He works in ways that don't often unpack themselves for us to see them clearly. Paul even writes in first Corinthians 13, "Now we see as in a glass dimly. One day we'll see face to face but until then there is some things we won't understand."

But the one thing I know about prayer is that Jesus talked about making prayer persistent. In other words, you don't quit. You ask God, and you ask God, and you keep on asking, and you keep on asking. So recently I filmed some specials on my book, *Praying Women*. And today we're going to look at what does it mean to be persistent in prayer? Watch this.

Begin video clip:

Session two: *The practice of persistence.*

Our prayer to God: Hear me!

SHEILA: Hi! And welcome to session two of our *Praying Women's* study. In session one you'll probably remember our prayer was very simple: Help me! In this session our prayer is: Hear me.

I don't know what battle you are facing right now. It might be for your child, it might be for your marriage, your health, or honestly, your very sanity. But what I want you to know is this. When we pray and refuse to give up no matter how long an answer takes, things change. If you're discouraged let me say in Jesus' name, hold on.

Perhaps no story in scripture is better known, while at the same time being I think misunderstood than the one that we'll look at today. The truth behind the story is wonderful. I've found it life-changing. Before we clear up the misunderstandings, let's look at the passage: *One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up. "There was a judge in a certain city," he said, "who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly*

saying, 'Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.' The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, 'I don't fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice because she is wearing me out with her constant requests.'" Then the Lord said, "Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?"

So with the story fresh in our minds, let's talk about how this parable has been misinterpreted and misunderstood down through the years. If you've ever been taught that you are a nuisance to your Heavenly Father when you keep bringing your needs to him, (and if you still feel that way you might want to rewatch session one of this guide) then the natural assumption when you read this story is that the judge is God Almighty and that yes, he is really fed up with hearing from you. You may believe that people who keep asking God for something drive him crazy but because won't shut up God eventually gives in. How devastating it would be if that were true. Let me say right here this is not true.

If we slow down and understand the content that Jesus himself provided, then we see how wrong this viewpoint is. Context is everything. Remember the reason Jesus told his story in the first place. It was to encourage his followers to always pray and never give up. Jesus was not saying: *We're bugging God. We must quit bugging God. Okay, fine, if we're going to insist on bugging God, then he'll eventually answer hoping that we'll just go away.*

As if to reinforce this point, Jesus ended his story with this rhetorical question: *Don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night?*

The implication here is clear. God is not like a careless judge. No, God is a loving father. God who created men and women in his own image and who sent his very son to die for

our sins so that he could relate intimately to us both now and for all eternity, who chose us as his beloved followers to be grafted into his family, who cannot change his feelings toward us and has loved us with an everlasting love, this God will hear us when we call and will come quickly to meet our need.

Thank you, Father, that this is who you are! *Your faithfulness endures. Your love overwhelms. Your provision is thorough and sound.*

I remember the first few weeks following the discovery that I was pregnant with my son. Honestly, they were some of the most joy-filled weeks of my whole life! And that the first few weeks following the discovery, that evidently my son was what they called "incompatible with life," as my doctor put it, were some of the worst weeks I'd ever known. I remember going to the beach early one morning to pray earnestly as I've never prayed before. I poured out my heart to Jesus. Something inside me shifted. What I hoped was this, my shift was a shift toward faith. Faith no matter what the outcome was.

Let's take another look at the parable of the persistent widow and look at what Jesus said in the final verse of that passage. So often we read this story, but we miss this last verse. This is it. It says: *"But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?"*

Now look at the words of Hebrews 11:1: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

In the original Greek the word *substance* means: The giving of substance, assurance, confidence. Well, based on that information what do you suppose faith has to do with persistence? How do you think those concepts are linked?

Here's the truth. *Faith makes it possible to keep praying even when we don't see an answer.* Let me repeat this because honestly, it is so important: *Faith makes it possible to keep praying even when you don't see an answer.*

When I stood on the beach that day having poured out my every last, desperate honest prayer before the Lord, I experienced, gosh it is like a profound, hard-to-put-into-words just knowing. It was as if for the first time in a long time I truly understood and believed that God was leaning in to hear me better, hanging on every word I said, attending to nothing else in the universe except me and my badly broken heart.

I hope you can relate. When have you experienced what I'm talking about here? This overwhelming sensation of our Heavenly Father regarding you with tenderness, almost as if he's inching closer to hear what you'll say. Sit with this question for a moment if you need to.

We tend to let negative memories prevail. The positive ones can take some time to surface but I'm sure if you've walked with the Lord for any length of time, you'll find one. When have you begged God for relief and been absolutely sure he heard you? When have you cried out and you've just known that he's near? When have you confessed to him and found him there to receive you? When have you felt very aware of his presence, not necessarily even of an answer? So many moments of my life when I thought I wanted an answer I discovered that what I really wanted was his presence. His presence changes everything.

In the parable of the persistent widow we see three phrases related to her situation. A progression I'd like us to follow. The phrases are these: *The woman had suffered an injustice of some kind. She then fought for justice to be restored. When the one charged with dispensing justice refused to hear her request, she refused to give up.*

The woman's request was a legal one requiring input from a judge. Your request might be a relational one as you're dealing with the actions of perhaps an inconsiderate spouse or a friend. Your request might be a financial one as you're facing bills that are greater than your income. Your request, it might be an emotional one involving emotions that are simply overwhelming. Your request, it might be a spiritual one in which you're longing to

feel God's presence every day.

Let me ask you this, if you and I were seated across from each other and I asked you, what is the most pressing request you've made of God today? If he appeared before us right now, if Christ himself sat down with us, what would you ask him for? How would you respond? When we are confident that God is both willing and able to help us, making our request known becomes so much easier and it keeps us from giving up.

It's interesting to note that the parable of the persistent widow is tucked between two conversations that Jesus had with his disciples, and by extension, because so are we, with you and me. Just before the parable Jesus explained to his followers that despite everyone's eagerness to know the time and the date of the coming of the kingdom of God we're not to engage in these conversations. The fact is that nobody knows the time and date apart from the father.

Just after the story of the persistent widow, Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector which highlights the difference between the haughty self-righteousness of the teacher of the law and praises the tax collector's humility and brokenness. Both before and after the parable of this persistent widow, Jesus demonstrated the foolishness of misplaced confidence in ourselves either in meaningless conversations, guessing when Christ might return or in thinking that God approves of us because of our own good behavior.

Only within the parable of the persistent widow do we see confidence rightly placed in God alone. *It is God who first loved us. It is God who first chose us. It is God who promises to provide for us. It is God alone in whom we have faith.*

What boldness shows up when our faith rests in him alone? Then we do begin to pray without ceasing, as the Apostle Paul tell us to do knowing with confidence that God hears and cares.

My encouragement to you today is for you to find your own stretch of deserted beach or quiet place and just pour out your heart to the Lord. Hold nothing back as you tell him of the pain, the hurt you feel you faced, pull up the prayer request that you stopped praying so long ago either because you lost faith that God was listening or because fresh heartaches took top spot on your list. Just bring them, place them at the feet of Jesus with absolute confidence that he hears you, that he cares for you, and that he will fight for you. Make a fresh declaration that your faith rests in God and in God alone.

May I pray for you? Father, what a joy it is to know that we get to come to you as we are, and you receive us. That you're not like an angry judge who is just tired of hearing from us. But you are a loving father who leans in, who bends down to listen to us. Lord, I pray for those right now who have almost lost hope, lost faith, think why bother praying? Father, I ask in the powerful name of Jesus that you would give them such a fresh sense of your presence and give them the grace to bring all that is in them to you. I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: You know one of the greatest freedoms in my life, and I didn't always have it, honestly, is realizing that I get to come to God as I really am. Not as I wish I was. I used to think that God's love was kind of based on my behavior. That if I felt like I had a really good day, and everything had gone well, and I felt like I had read enough of my Bible, and I'd prayed enough, then I felt like God loved me more on those days than the days when I felt as if I had just failed miserably and fell into old habits or just messed up and didn't talk to God. I actually believed that on days like that God loved me less. And it took the crumbling of my whole life at one point for me to understand this amazing truth: We get to come to God right now as we really are.

If you're having a terrible day, a terrible week, maybe you've gone through a year that was so painful and you think, you know what? Once my life gets back in order again then

I'll come to God. Please, I ask you in Jesus' name, would you just come now? Come as you are. Maybe you think, I don't know how to pray big prayers. Great! I'm sure sometimes God gets tired of hearing big prayers. You simply can talk to him because he loves you. You can just simply use the name of Jesus. One of the most powerful prayers in the world is the name "Jesus." Some mornings that's all I do. Some mornings when I wake up and I don't feel that great I'll go on out on my little balcony and I'll raise my arms and I'll just say, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" And I'll feel held, and I'll feel loved and I'll feel received.

And that's what we want for you. I want you to know that as you are right now that God loves you. I wrote about that and so much more in my book, *Praying Women*. I want to let you know how we can send you your very own copy. But first of all I want to ask you if you'd do something with us. We pray every single day every day here at *LIFE*, all the staff, that we would be able to feed you spiritually. But there are some people on the planet right now who desperately, desperately need simply to be fed so that they can live and come to know God themselves. Please would you watch this?

On the mission field

Announcer: *LIFE Outreach International* teams, along with our mission partners travel the world documenting the needs of families who lack the very basics of life. Without a doubt, Africa's children always tear at the heart of our teams when they see them struggling in extreme circumstances.

SHEILA: I can't imagine what it would be like to be a mother like this and want desperately to help your child. This is the hospital that some of these moms had to walk ten or fifteen kilometers with a seriously malnourished baby just to try and get some help. And if they can get here in time, then there is some hope. But time is everything here, as you can see.

TRANSLATOR: I remember when my brother died. We were hungry and he was so thin. My mom took him to a clinic that was very far away. He died on the way there.

Announcer: It is now up to us to do something to help relieve the plight of these little ones. A bowl of food a day provided through our Mission Feeding program can make the difference between life and death for young children.

SHEILA: But my prayer is that we can save hundreds of other children before they get to this stage. No child should ever get to this stage. No mom should ever have to watch this. So if we do something now, we can stop this from happening.

End of clip

In the studio

SHEILA: It's almost inconceivable to me that this is still happening in our world in this year. When you think how far technology has come and all the new discoveries, the things we can do. The fact that these little ones are literally starving to death is so wrong. It is terrible! But we can do something about it.

When *LIFE Outreach International* began their feeding program it literally turned villages around. And we've made a commitment to feed 350,000 children. You know those little bowls, you've probably seen them. Sometimes they're orange, sometimes they're red but each child when we've set up a feeding program in a village they'll come and line up. I've had the privilege of putting that meal into their little bowl. It looks a little like oatmeal but it's not. It is a specific blend of things that these children in that part of the world need that we'll give them, protein and vitamins, and build up their systems.

Seeing those children in those malnutrition clinics is heartbreaking. And looking into the eyes of the mothers because their just like us, they just happen to live in a different part of the world. But looking into the eyes of these moms and seeing that kind of

hopelessness. So please, we need your help. Some of you have done a lot before and I'm asking to you continue. \$30 will feed three children for three months. \$50 will feed five children for three months. \$100 will feed ten children for three months.

But we have an extra crisis at the moment. When we talked in that piece about mothers travelling sometimes on foot for miles and kilometers to get to the clinic. Well, something devastating happened recently in South Sudan where 16 of the clinics were washed away. Can you imagine being that mom? You realize, if I don't get my child to the clinic soon, they're not going make it. And you walk, and you walk, and you walk, and you get there, and the clinic is gone!

Would you consider giving an extra gift to help us rebuild these 16 clinics? They're so needed. This isn't like putting up a movie theater somewhere. This is life and death for people. So to put the 16 clinics back in is going to cost about \$392,000 in total. So I'm just asking, if you're able, would you give an extra gift? We're not giving up on feeding the 350,000 children; that will always be our commitment. We have promised our partners on the ground that food will be there. But if you can, would you consider giving an extra gift so that these life-giving clinics can be there?

Please, would you go to your phone and just do what you can? If every one of us, if we all do what we can, we can change the world. Please call 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: In Angola right now we're seeing our malnutrition clinics fuller than they've ever been. Literally, in certain circumstances there is more than one child per bed. There are mothers on the floor with children. The situation is absolutely critical right now.

But we have the solution. We're in place. We're ready to save their lives. But the last and final ingredient we do not have, and that is the resources to make it possible for us to procure the food we need and to get the food to those people that so desperately need it. Open your hearts today. Partner with us giving the gift of life by giving the gift of food.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Isn't that amazing? That such a little amount can make such a huge difference? \$30, if you take a family out for a meal, [Snaps fingers] it's gone like that! Can you imagine that same \$30 if you stay home and cook something would feed three children for three months?

For any gift at all I'd love to send you my book, *Praying Women*; "How to pray when you don't know what to say." We have lots of gifts that we'd love to send you. I know you don't do it for the gifts, but we want to feed you spiritually just as you help us feed these children physically when they get strong and they're able to hear about the reason we came was because of Jesus. Help us be his hands and feet today, would you? Thanks for being with us. We'll see you next time.