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Week 32: WFL

Sheila Walsh

"Trusting God Over the Long Haul"

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. Let me ask you a question. When you read a verse like when Paul said, "It is for freedom that you have been set free," what does that say to you? If we associate it with the times that we're living in, what Paul was saying to the people who lived in the church in Galatia was that some of the stricter Jews who had not embraced Jesus were still trying to get the people to follow the 613 laws and rules that every Jew who wanted to honor God lived under. But Paul was saying to them, no, no, no! Don't get bound up again. Christ has set you free.

But how does that affect you and I? If you think about your own life, are there areas where you think I'm not free? And sometimes the areas where we're not free are things that we're not very proud of, so we don't ask for help.

I have a friend at the moment, someone I really love, who is struggling with alcoholism. She'll do really well for like five months, and then she'll fall off the wagon. So I've said to her, "Listen, the only thing I ask of you is, please keep talking to me. If you fall off the wagon, call me. I don't care if it is 3:00 in the morning, and we'll pray together because every day with Jesus is a new beginning."

And I want you to know that. I don't care what you've got caught up in. Well, I care if it is hurting you, but I want you to know there is power in the name of the Lord. And whatever you think is binding you up, you can be set free. And if you fall down, you can be set free. And if you mess up again, you can be set free. That's why Jesus came.

Not so long ago, I wrote a book called, *Praying Women*, because I found a lot of people like me struggled with prayer. How do you apply it to every single area of your life? So today, we're going to look at what that means to really be free. Watch this.

Praying Women

Session Four: Trusting God Over the Long Haul.

Our Prayer to God: "Free Me!"

Begin video clip:

SHEILA: Welcome to session four, "Trusting God Over the Long Haul." So our prayer for this session is this: Free me!

As I thought about our subject today, it reminded me of one of the most difficult and desperate times in my own life when I was struggling and first diagnosed with clinical depression. At my lowest point, when I cried out to God for help, when I poured out my fears and questions at his feet, I honestly had no idea what I was asking for. I know I wanted the pain, the despair, and the hopelessness to go away. I did not understand that night that my questions would lead to one of the most profound questions that Christ has ever asked, "Do you want to get well?"

Honestly, I didn't know if that was even possible. In that psychiatric hospital room, it felt more like a prison. I couldn't imagine how I would ever be well again. But I was about to embark on what was truly a painful but liberating journey of learning what being well and free really means.

In his gospel, Matthew records for us an invitation that Jesus made to a crowd one day. But what they heard was very different from what you and I hear when we read these same words today. You probably remember this passage at the end of Matthew 11. Jesus

said: "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 am 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've always read those words from when I was just a little girl as an encouragement to lay everything at Jesus' feet when I'm overwhelmed and exhausted. But if you'd been standing in that crowd that day, what Jesus said, his invitation in that cultural context was absolutely life changing. Every Jew who wanted to live a life that honored God woke up every morning under what was called "the burden of the law"; 613 rules laid out by Moses. Think about it; that's a lot of things to get right every day. A lot of things to do and a lot of things to refrain from doing. So when Jesus told them that his burden was light, this was like a whole new way of living.

Let me just pause for a moment here and ask you, does your burden right now feel light? Or do you feel as if it's absolutely crushing you? As wives and moms, sisters and friends, we tend to take on too much. We want to make things better for everyone else, and more often than not, we end up so weighed down that it is hard to keep moving. Add to that any self-condemnation, and we're just right under a rock. But I don't believe that's how God wants us to live.

It would be easy to view Jesus' promise of a light burden only in terms of our circumstantial conditions in life. But Scripture paints a far broader picture than that. For instance, we read in Galatians 5:1 that Christ has truly set us free. And because of this freedom, we don't need to get tied up again in slavery to the law.

One of my very favorite books in the whole Bible is the book of Romans. In writing to house churches in Rome, Paul lays out the difference between the old covenant, under which God's people struggled under the burden of the law, and the new covenant, which is about the freedom that has come in Christ.

In Romans 8:1, we find there is no longer condemnation for those who long to Christ Jesus. And because we belong to Jesus, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed us from the power of sin that leads to death.

Later in the same chapter, we learn that once we're free in Christ, we have no obligation to do what our sinful nature urges us to do. For if you live by its dictates, verses 13 and 14 say, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

As Galatians 5:13 says: We have been called to live in freedom.

It's actually possible for you and me to use that freedom, not to satisfy our sinful nature, but to serve one another in love. Through the testimony of these and hundreds of more verses of Scripture, we rightly conclude that the light burden of walking faithfully with Jesus over the long haul relates not merely to healing from yesterday's struggles, managing today's present pain, and overcoming the challenges that are sure to arise tomorrow, but also to the soul's desire to live whole, to be holy, to live free. As Paul wrote to the Galatians in Galatians five, verse one: So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free.

Letting God's will fully unfold in our lives, instead of selfishly pursuing our own habits and desires, is a type of wellness that only Christ can bring. Case in point, the lame man from John Chapter 5. Afterward, Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. Inside the city, near the sheep gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. Crowds of sick people--blind, lame, or paralyzed--lay on the porches. One of the men lying there had been sick for 38 years. When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, "Would you like to get well?"

"I can't, sir," the sick man said, "for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me."

Jesus told him, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!" Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, "You can't work on the Sabbath! The law doesn't allow you to carry that sleeping mat!"

But he replied, "The man who healed me told me, pick up your mat and walk."

"Who said such a thing as that?" They demanded.

The man didn't know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. But afterward, Jesus found him in the temple and told him, "Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you."

Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him.

Thirty-eight years this man had been lame. Think about it; you can pack a lot of life into 38 years. If you're lame for 38 years, you're sure you'll never walk again. If you're blind for 38 years, you're sure you will never see again. If you're mute for 38 years, you're sure you'll never speak again. And if you're stuck in sin for 38 years, you're sure you'll never be free again.

Jesus, however, has a much better plan. It would be easy to read the story of the lame man and come away believing that the physical healing afforded him was physical in nature and nothing more. But to do so would be to miss the broader point. When Jesus asked the man if he wanted to get well, the Greek word is *hugies*, which in addition to connoting health in one's body means: To be true, sound, whole. *Hugies*, get well; to be restored to health physically; to be true, to be sound, to be whole.

Do you want to be true? Do you want to be sound? Do you want to be whole?

The question is deeper than we once thought. The question is tougher to answer than we maybe originally believed. Why do you think that Jesus asked the man if he wanted to get well? Aside from the man's explanation that whenever the healing waters were stirred up, he wasn't quick enough to reach them, what might have stopped this man from wanting to be well? I think the harsh reality is that sometimes we get comfortable in our own brokenness.

Let me ask you a question. If Jesus were to appear before you now and say, "My beloved child, I see the struggles you are dealing with, and I want to help untangle you from the mess you're in. But first, a question: Do you really want to be made whole?" How do you think you'd respond? We can either back down in the midst of struggles, or by God's grace, stand up and pray through the pain.

In Isaiah 53, the prophet reminds us of the truth about our Master Jesus, saying: There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. He was despised and rejected--a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment for God, a punishment for his own sins!

And then in verse five, as if to counter these false beliefs about the Messiah, the prophet says: But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed.

He was beaten so we could be whole. The King James Version says that the chastisement of our peace was upon him. And yet, Jesus bore that weight gladly. He took on the full punishment for our sin as though he himself deserved it. Knowing that this profound act of ultimate, ultimate atoning service was the only way to get us back to God.

Why did he do it? Why would he do that? So that you could be whole. So that you could free. So that today and every day wholeness would characterize your very life. So even in

the darkest of the valleys, we would remember who and whose we are. And so that with the great hymn-writer of old, we might say, even so, even so, no matter what is going on, no matter what might be true right now, even so, it is well with my soul.

May I pray for you? Father, it's so hard to find adequate words to even begin to speak of your greatness. I thank you, Lord, that you saw people when you walked on this earth. You saw beyond their excuses or the traditional things they thought were the right thing to say. And you saw right into the depth of their being and asked, "Do you want to get well?"

Father, I just pray for all watching right now. For those who are struggling, who feel identified by what's wrong with them, that they would tear that label off and be identified with whose they are, a son, a daughter, a child of the Most High God. So we say yes, Lord. Yes, Lord! I want to be well, in Jesus' name. Amen.

In the studio:

SHEILA: I grew up in a little church in Scotland where we sang that hymn, gosh, probably every second Sunday night, "It is Well with My Soul." But it wasn't until I was in seminary that I heard the story, which I'm sure you're familiar with.

Horatio Spafford, a very successful Chicago businessman, in the terrible fire that hit Chicago, lost his business and also lost a son. They're supposed to be in England for D.L. Moody's campaign, for his evangelistic campaign, but he had to stay behind to take care of some things. So he put his wife, and he put his girls on a boat, and he said, "Okay, I will join you soon."

And then, as you probably know, halfway across that voyage, there was a devastating storm. And that mother, Horatio's wife was, survived alone, her children drowned. And he got on a boat and made the same journey. When he came to the place in the ocean where his children had gone down, the captain actually knocked on his cabin door and

said, "I wondered if you wanted to come out." And they stood there together, honoring the place where his children had disappeared under the water. He went back to his cabin and wrote, "It is Well with My Soul."

We could only say that in the midst of devastating tragedy when we understand who we are and whose we are. He knew his children who loved Jesus were safely home. And he knew, because of the grace of God that floods us in the worst of moments, that he and his wife would be able to carry on loving Jesus.

The amazing thing, the more in love you fall with Jesus, the more that your eyes are opened to the bigger picture because this world, this is not our home. Our home is safe with God in heaven. But as long as you and I are on this earth, we want to do as much as we can to spread the good news of Jesus, and sometimes, that good news first comes with a cup of clean water. Watch this.

On the mission field:

TAMMY: I have the privilege on occasion of being a part of the *LIFE Outreach* mission team. It is always a reminder of the awesome responsibility that we have of learning about and documenting the lives of precious people who have really great needs. And without fail, we discover struggling families, particularly mothers, and their children, as they unfold their stories about the lack of basic necessities, waterborne illnesses, hopelessness, and oftentimes, even death.

Open Captions:

>> My baby twins died. They had diarrhea and swollen bellies from the water they drank. It is not safe.

>> My son Mothsaman had diarrhea and died. I am worried my daughter will also die.

TAMMY: These stories capture not only the heart of thousands of the friends of *LIFE*

but each one of our hearts as we go about our work.

We've sat with mothers who have lost their children. We've sat next to gravesites and wept with these families that feel so incredibly hopeless. The suffering is so great, and it is so deep. I've seen their very source of water that is actually the source that is killing them, their children, and their families.

During these fact-finding missions, our teams are able to offer comfort to the mothers and their children through prayer and expressions of love. But the only way hope can be renewed in these mother's hearts, and the lives of their precious children is if we have the resources to put our words of love into action by providing them with clean, fresh drinking water that they so desperately need.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: That darling girl in that piece, with the blond hair, Tammy Trent, is one of our dear friends here at *LIFE*. And she understands suffering, and she understands the power of water. She and her husband, Trent, were on a vacation, and he was a great diver. He went for a dive and didn't come back up. They searched for hours, and then she eventually had to go; a doctor and his wife took her in, and she went to sleep. They would begin again in the morning. And when she woke up the next morning, she woke up to two pieces of news, one they discovered her husband's body, Trent, and he had not survived. The other thing was it was September 11th, 2001, and all the world had changed. Tammy understands suffering, so when she is there in those places, she sees in the eyes of these mothers the agony she went through when she had to bury her darling husband.

The thing about this situation, though, that is different is we can stop this. We have made a commitment to drill 350 fresh wells that go deep down into the earth; not like these hand-dug wells where the water is still filthy and contaminated. But we drill deep down

into the earth to get clean water. We're going to put 350 wells, with your help, in over 20 nations this year. And here's how you can help. For \$48, you can provide clean water for ten children for the rest of their lives. What else could you do with \$48 that would have a lifelong significance?

If you're able to give more, \$144 will give clean water for 30 children. And if you or your Sunday School group or your extended family, if you decide, you know what? I'm going to take up that. We're going to drill one well. You can do that for \$4800. Please would you consider that?

And for any gift at all, I would love to send you my book, *Praying Women*: "How to pray when you don't know what to say" when heaven seems silent, when you need to persist in prayer, when you need to be relentless, or when you need a breakthrough. I know you don't do it for our gifts. It is just our way of trying to bless you. But we need your help.

We have promised our partners on the ground who are waiting even now that we will get them the funds they need to drill 350 wells in over 20 nations that will change lives, we pray eternally. Please go to your phone, give the very best gift you can.

Begin video clip:

ANNOUNCER: Waterborne illness is a killer that strikes the most vulnerable. For many impoverished families, the death of a child is the tragic result of having no choice but to drink contaminated water. But with your help, they won't have to make this choice ever again. Mission: Water for LIFE provides clean, fresh drinking 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 for

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 James Robison's book *Living Amazed* full of inspirational true stories. You'll learn how divine encounters can change your life. In addition you'll also receive Randy Robison's brand-new devotional, *Upgrade: "Seven moves in seven weeks to a better life."*

With your gift of \$100 or more please request the N.I.V. Thinline Bible with easy-to-read large print. 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 inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

On the mission field:

JAMES: Now these are beautiful children and beautiful families that have come here to contaminated water sources and with your help we're giving, not only here in Africa, help to people but in countries all over the world where people are dying of diseases from contaminated water. We can drill wells in scores of countries if you would just help drill one well. Maybe you could drill a well or join one or two other people to drill one.

But we need every person watching to do your part in helping provide families like this, and children like this, water sources, non-contaminated water, clean water in nations throughout the world. And every time we do it, we inspire others to join us.

So would you be that source of inspiration and help by making the best gift you can today?

SHEILA: Thank you so much! I never take it for granted that you stay with us through the whole program. I'm so grateful for that. I know that that honors God when you're willing to have your eyes open to the need.

And for any gift that you send in today, you can request my book, *Praying Women*: "How to pray when you don't know what to say." I'm talking about all sorts of situations when heaven is silent. Or when you need to know that God is listening.

But please, if the lines were busy, keep calling. Your one gift will make a difference in the lives of so many. So thank you so much for being with us. I'm Sheila Walsh, and we'll see you next time on *LIFE Today*.