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Week 43: Rescue LIFE

Sheila Walsh

"Holding On When You Feel Alone"

SHEILA: I'm Sheila Walsh. Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I wanted you to know before we get into the program how much we love you. We want you to know that we're here for you. If you're ever struggling or you feel alone, we have a prayer center and wonderful prayer partners who stand by and who would honestly love to pray with you and encourage you.

Well, today, I want us to look at this theme: Holding on when you feel alone, and God seems silent. What does God's word say to us when life falls apart, and we feel so alone? Even though I see brokenness in myself and in others, even though there are circumstances in life that just don't make sense, I know this: God is good, God is love, God is in control, and God's word is alive and can help us make it all the way home.

Over the past years, I've learned that in almost everyone's life, there comes the point when the phrase "Hanging on by a thread" becomes all too real. Perhaps, your child rejects Christ. Or you get a diagnosis that cancer has come back. Or a spouse walks out. When life really hurts, the temptation to let go increases. We are tempted to think this is too hard. It's too hard to hold on. I don't know how we'll get through this. Or to even ask this question, where are you, Lord?

I remember the deep confusion and loneliness that followed my father's death. A brain aneurism that drastically altered my father's once loving and kind, and funny personality eventually led to his hospitalization and eventual death by suicide. My family never

spoke about it. Scottish children didn't attend funerals back then, so I only recall my mother coming home in a simple black dress and hat. Questions and fears nearly suffocated me.

Well, later in life, before I was diagnosed with clinical depression, I felt like I was disappearing a little bit more every single day. I tried to pray, but no amount of fasting or prayer seemed to shake the crushing weight of sadness that I felt I lived with on a daily basis. I loved God -- but I felt miserable. And worse than that, the heavens seemed silent.

But here's what I know now. No matter what my emotions told me, God was still working. This is one of my favorite new verses. You might want to look it up in your Bible and underline it. In John chapter 5, verse 17, Jesus said this: "My father is always working, and so am I." "My father is always working, and so am I." That is a rock-solid promise no matter what we're facing.

So often, life seems bleak until we remember two key words: But God. When those two words come together, deep truths await every single one of us. Life hurts, but God hurts with us. Anxiety feels overwhelming, but God is greater than our fears. Hope seems hopeless, but God never stops working.

In the moments of our greatest pain, when the battle for our hope and joy is raging, Christ wants to become more real to us, more real than he ever has. So if you've ever felt alone, maybe you feel that way now, or that God is silent, let's look at these three truths. *Truth number one: Shame is a liar, but you can anchor yourself to the truth of God's word. Truth number two: We can still worship in the midst of what we don't understand. And truth number three: Even when you can't see God's plan when you're asked to wait, God is working.*

The writer to the Hebrews knew God intimately. In profound ways, this book of the Bible shares great truths about our Heavenly Father, about our Savior, Jesus Christ, and about the Spirit who indwells us.

Hebrews chapter 6, verses 17-20. And The Message says this: *When God wanted to guarantee his promises, he gave his word, a rock-solid guarantee -- and because his word cannot change, the promise is likewise unchangeable. We who have run for our very lives to God have every reason to grab the promised hope with both hands and never let go. It is an unbreakable spiritual lifeline, reaching past all appearances right to the very presence of God, where Jesus, running on ahead of us, has taken up his permanent post as High Priest for us.*

In Christ, we have an unshakeable and certain hope, a hope that anchors our soul to God himself. When we fasten our hearts to the word of truth, we too will become unshakeable. Not because we've got everything figured out, but because God's promises never change. God will not. Indeed, God cannot break his word. Remember Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

Let me ask you something. Is it easy or difficult for you to believe that God's promises are unshakeable?

In the English Standard Version Hebrews six: Verse 19 describes our hope in God's word as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. I've been doing quite a bit of research, and this passage led me to Thayer's Greek Lexicon, which points out that anchors haven't changed very much since ancient times. They are still used to hold a ship in place. I found that vaguely interesting, but far more comforting, is this truth found later in the book of Hebrews that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Anchors may not have changed much through the years, but our Lord hasn't changed at all. He will always be your anchor in a storm.

I don't know about you, but I'm far from unchangeable. So whenever I'm struggling, I'll open my Bible. That may seem obvious to you, but for me, God's truth is life and breath. I don't always find easy answers, but I find myself in the pages of God's word. In all my times of self-doubt of insecurity, I anchor my emotions to the truth of the Word of God,

and I remember that I am not alone.

Just before his death, Jesus prayed that God would make us holy by this truth. If we're not anchoring ourselves to God's word, to God's truth, we can quickly become untethered by our emotions. I found in speaking to women and men around the world that the enemy uses a particular evil strategy to separate us from the anchor of our souls. The weapon of his choice, the weapon of mass destruction: Shame!

So let's look at truth number one: *Shame is a liar, but you can anchor yourself to the truth of God's word.* One of my favorite writers and theologians, Louis Schmitt, defines shame as a feeling that we do not measure up and maybe never will. Maybe we'll never measure up to the sort of people we're meant to be. The feeling, when we're conscious of it, gives us a vague, kind of a disgust with ourselves, which in turn feels like a hunk of lead on our hearts.

Through shame, the enemy attacks the very core of our identity, crushing us under the weight of the secrecy and the fear that shame breeds. Shame focuses not on a bad thing you've done or a bad thing you've said but on who we are. You'll never be good enough. There is something wrong with you. You're worthless. You're just not enough. Have you ever felt those things? As these lies take root within us, shame moves from a feeling to a state of being. Have you ever felt less than? Or struggled with these not-good-enough thoughts? Shame is a liar, and we have to combat it with God's truth.

I'm so grateful that in the pages of his word, God reveals his solution for shame, and it's grace. The grace of God triumphs over shame. His grace settles the questions of our acceptance, our worthiness, our value. Because of grace, we're accepted at a depth of our beings; we're accepted without the possibility of rejection. We are deemed not merely good enough but loved, accepted, treasured.

Shame will try to make you feel alone, make you feel weak, but God's truth enables you to hold on when emotions scream at you, give up! Let go. Grace speaks a more powerful

word of hope to your heart. Shame says you're done. Grace says you're just beginning. Grace is what we need, and His grace is enough. When you feel the silent, gnawing ache of loneliness when the accuser hurls shaming lies at your heart, you can turn; you can run to God's word and anchor yourself to his truth. We can control very little in life, but we can control our choices. We can choose to hang on to Jesus when circumstances tempt us to let go and despair. Grace enables us to overcome shame. Grace redeems our pain, turning the aches and the ashes of our heartbreak into something good, something for God's glory.

Let's look at truth number two: *You can worship in the midst of what you don't understand*. When you have walked through tough times, when you feel as if you're walking through the valley of the shadow of death and you still choose to love God, I want you to know all of heaven celebrates. When you fall to your knees with questions on your lips and tears on your face and still worship God, all of heaven celebrates.

First Peter 1 tells us that while we may suffer trials for a while, this suffering proves the genuineness of our faith, which is worth more than gold. Someone who understood suffering and extreme trials in scripture was Job. There is so much to learn from his story. Even after losing his wealth, his health, and his ten children, Job worshipped God. In the depth of his agony, Job acknowledged God's sovereignty, despite, honestly, unfathomable suffering. Though his wife encouraged Job, why don't you just curse God and die? This remarkable man held on to his redeemer.

In faith, Job proclaimed, *"I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end, he will stand on the earth."* You'll note that Job didn't say I know that my God lives and that in the end, he will stand on the earth. With eyes of faith and divine revelation, I believe, Job looked through the centuries and saw that Jesus was on his way.

God's word provides another remarkable example of faithful worship in the midst of affliction. You can read the whole story in Daniel chapter three. You may remember the story. Three young men refused to worship anyone but God, and because of that, they

were thrown into a raging hot furnace. The king who had demanded that worship looked into the flames and couldn't understand what he was seeing. He knew there should only be three men in the fire, but when he looked, he said, "Look, I see four men walking around in the fire." The fourth man, biblical scholars call that a Christophany, a moment in history when Christ appeared in human form before his virgin birth. Jesus literally stood in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These three brave souls refused to worship any but the living God.

Now they knew, and they said before they were thrown into the flames, "God could rescue us." But they said, "Even if he doesn't, we won't worship you." That's the kind of faith that honors God, an even-if faith.

If you've ever experienced the silence of heaven, I empathize at a deep level. I know how desperate the silence of God can feel. Job endured long days of suffering waiting for a word from the Lord, and during that time, so-called friends heaped shaming messages on Job. "You must have done something wrong. Clearly, God is not pleased with you. You just better pull yourself together." Job sought answers for the questions, why? How long? He desperately wanted to understand. I would have too. Through Job's experience, however, we see that there really are no answers big enough for extreme human suffering. Instead of answers, God gave Job something far better; the Lord gave him himself. The Lord gives us himself in the presence of the good that we seek. The nearness of God is the good we honestly look for.

It takes me to truth number three: *Even when we can't see his plan, even when we're asked to wait, God is working.* When agonizing days drag into heartbreaking weeks, months, perhaps even years for you, we may feel as if the door of heaven has been shut and double-bolted against us. We believe that God is loving and merciful. We believe he is a God of all comfort. We believe he cares for us. We believe that he speaks to his people. We believe all of that, and yet, we are living with the silence of God. That is when the presence of God can become dearer to us than life itself.

I love this verse from Romans 8:26-27: *And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. 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 us believers in harmony with God's own will.*

Never forget not only that, but Jesus is always praying for you. Never forget when you can't even utter a word, the Holy Spirit is interceding for you. The silence of heaven does not mean that God has stopped working. He has not withdrawn his presence. His nearness is your good even when you are asked to wait.

Honestly, only the presence of God enables us to hold on when the pain of life shouts, let go. Only our never-stopping, never-failing, never-giving-up God is strong enough to anchor us to hope. Christ, the perfect Lamb of God. The one who spoke the world into being is with you and me right now.

I know how hard it can be when you're just holding on when you just want an answer, and it seems as if God is saying nothing. I promise you, your prayers are being heard. God's timing doesn't always make sense to us, but when you remember this, God loves you, God is for you, God will never leave you, God hears every prayer that we're able to hold on to hope even when it feels as if life is falling apart.

And that's exactly how it feels for some young girls right now. They are wondering if hope is even worth it because they've been holding on for a long time. And the amazing thing is, you and I, right now, are going to have the privilege of being an answer to their prayers. Would you watch this?

On the mission field:

SHEILA: There is a little trick that's helped me through some of my darkest days in the field with *LIFE Outreach International*. I smile. I smile not to trivialize the unimaginable

despair of those who are suffering but to remind everyone, including myself that a little kindness can bring some light to a dark world. And it can be such a dark world!

The sexual abuse of children has been industrialized and brought to scale in what I believe to be one of the starkest examples of demonic activity on earth today.

I asked her, "Who do you have who is caring for you?" She has no one. She started out trying to sell cookies and she couldn't make enough to live on. So she ended up having to sell her own body.

Now I'm no stranger to the plight of a desperate soul but the young women I've spoken with, young children have left a mark on my life that will stay with me forever. This precious girl was begging for money on the streets when she was first abducted at the age of nine. Her captors raped her and forced her to sleep with up to four men a night.

Open Captions: I'm scared when I have to go out at night. I just want a good home with food to eat and a place to sleep.

SHEILA: It's horrific to think of the unspeakable torment that children face and I'm grateful when they survive it. But survival is a far cry from healing. God has given you and me the sacred power to help reach, rescue, and restore a precious life from the evils of human trafficking. Right now the choice of whether to exercise that power is ours to make.

In the studio:

SHEILA: I remember asking one of the pastors that we work with on the ground in Southeast Asia, how do you convey to a girl her value and her worth? And he said something I'd never heard in my life before. He said, "Well, initially, I tell them they're worth more than a chicken." I said, "I don't even understand what that means." He said, "Because a chicken is sold for more than a girl is."

Can you imagine that that's the kind of value that's placed on your life? So many of those girls that you saw at the beginning of that piece almost look like they're having a good time, and I promise you, they are not having a good time. But, when that makeup is removed, when those clothes they have to dress up in, when that's all gone, what you have left is little girls, like the ones you saw, who think there is nobody on this earth who cares about me.

When I got back from my second trip to Southeast Asia, I just kind of did a whole new look at my faith through the eyes of that experience. I thought about the things that I think about or worry about or maybe save up for, things I think that matter, and I thought, if the whole purpose of our life as believers is to glorify God and to spread the good news, if that's it, it's basically to glorify our Father, to become more like Jesus, and to reach others with the good news. This is what matters.

Through Rescue LIFE, we have this incredible system set up. It is a three-part system: Reach, rescue, and restore. *Reach* means we go into the villages before these girls have ever been trafficked. That's our number one priority. Can we get to the girls before this has ever happened to them and warn them about the danger? But so many of them have already been trafficked, and they've ended up in these devastating brothels.

So then it is to *rescue*. Our teams on the ground just blow me away. They will go into these brothels at midnight. They will kick down the doors. They will literally carry these girls to freedom and make sure the traffickers are arrested.

But then we bring them to a place of hope. That's where *restore* comes in, where we can teach them that they are loved by God and that they have value. They're not worth less than a chicken! They are worth the death of Jesus Christ; He died for every single one of them.

So please, will you help us in this mission? We have a matching gift at the moment of

\$320,000 from some of our incredibly faithful donors. If you're watching, thank you! But it means that instead of \$128 being required to begin the process of reach, rescue, and restore, now for \$64, that will be matched, and one girl will be reached. If you're able to do more. If you could do \$1280, that will be matched; 20 girls will be brought into freedom. We can all do something.

And for any gift at all, please request my book. I'll be honored to send it to you. Let's all do something in Jesus' name. Please call that number on your screen, or go online and make the best gift you can. Let's bring hope to the hopeless.

Begin video clip:

ANNOUNCER: Innocent children and young people, longing to be loved and cared for, are being abducted and sold at the hands of violent predators, forced into the evil industry of human trafficking.

Through Mission: Rescue *LIFE*, you can reach out to educate children at risk of being trafficked, rescue those already enslaved, and restore young lives giving them a future.

With a generous \$320,000 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 today, we'll send you Sheila Walsh's brand-new book, *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*; "A lifeline of hope for those who feel their life is falling apart."

With your gift of \$128 or more, you'll receive the *Beauty Out of Ashes* puzzle set

featuring an image taken by our team while on a trip to the mission field. This 500-piece puzzle forms a beautiful portrait of hope in the midst of despair. Included is a 24-piece puzzle for your children and grandchildren.

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

DAVID: As you've seen today, the world of human trafficking is dark, and it is evil. It breaks my heart knowing that there are boys and girls in various places of the world and that at this very moment, they're being abused, and they're being forced into slavery.

God hears their cries. He is the father to the fatherless. He is the defender of the weak. He is the defender of the poor and the oppressed. So we pray that you will stand in the gap for these children.

So please do what you can do. Call the number, go online and just make the best gift that you can. You will be saving their lives and providing each one of these kids with a new life.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Thank you so much. And remember, for any gift at all, you can request a copy of my brand-new book, *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*. I think this is one of the greatest privileges on earth to actually be doing the things that Jesus would be doing if he was still physically on earth. But he is alive and well and living in you and me, and we have this awesome privilege to reach, to rescue, to restore in his name.

So please keep calling. If each one of us just gives the best gift we can, can you imagine the tidal wave of hope that will go out around the world?

Thanks for being with us. For all of us here at *LIFE Today*, we love you, and we'll see you next time!