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Week 47: Fall Mission Feeding

Sheila Walsh

"Held By the Promises of God"

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. The last year and a half I spent writing a book called *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*. I spent the first half of the book looking at all of the things that we struggle with; feeling afraid, feeling alone, feeling as if life is out of control. But then I kind of turned the tide when I got to the second part, and I wanted to remind us of what is true.

So today, I want to talk about being: Held by the promises of God. I, confession, grew up wrestling with two sides of me. Both were me, but honestly, they did not live very well together. They fought for center stage. The first one, I think, was probably the more authentic one, the real me. When I was really little, I was an adventurous, fearless, glass way more than half full kind of girl. I climbed trees, hugged random dogs, and I introduced myself to everyone by my full name. "Hello! My name is Sheila Davina Walsh." I believed that anything was possible and the world was beautiful and meant to be explored.

But the second one appeared after my father's death by suicide. Honestly, and knocked that joy-filled, fearless child out cold. I was afraid of everything. I was afraid of men. I was afraid of any kind of confrontation. I would see wolves in hedges that turned out to be dogs, but they still made my heart beat out of my chest. I was terrified of anyone in a mask because of what the mask might be concealing. So I lived with this kind of quiet dread that something was about to go terribly wrong at any moment.

Honestly, I believed that not based on some irrational fear, but on things I had actually

lived through. My dad's intermittent rage before he died really upended my family's jigsaw puzzle. It didn't simply upend it; it scattered the pieces so far apart it took years to find some of them again.

As a child, it was impossible for me to process what had happened in any way that made sense to me. When the one person you looked up to and lean on more than anyone else in the world becomes really a terrifying stranger in your home, where do you turn? I was always very close to my mum, but my dad, he was my hero. He was like the yes. The "Yes, you can" voice in my life.

The night before my father's brain aneurism, all I wanted was a dog. In the weeks and months that followed, all I wanted was a place to hide. In recent years, I believe we have learned so much more about how to help children process grief, trauma, and pain, but when I was little, we had no tools. We simply didn't talk about it. It can be a devastating thing when children are left to draw their own conclusions about what happened to them. Inevitably, they bear the brunt of the blame on their own tender shoulders.

Years later, when I spent a month in a psychiatric hospital, I met a woman who had chosen a life of service to God on the mission field overseas. She absolutely hated it and eventually had a complete breakdown and was sent home. When she chose that life, it was her way of trying to balance the scales of her childhood. She had been sexually abused by her sister's husband for years, and she had decided in her own tender heart that it was her fault.

I just pause here, and I think about you. I wonder if you can relate to that kind of internal battle. Traumatic experiences in childhood shift how we see and react to the world around us, and that legacy, honestly, can last for years. If you were abused in any way as a child, particularly by someone you trusted to love and protect you, that can cast a long shadow on future relationships. And later in life, when somebody promises to love and protect you, there will be just this little part of you that's conscious or not that kind of doubts if you can fully trust that promise. And then, when you do hit the inevitable

bumps in life that any relationship faces, they'll have more significance and history attached to them than what is actually happening in that moment.

I've spoken to multitudes of women and men who have experienced abuse as a child, and their stories honestly break my heart. If this is your story, I'm more sorry than I know how to put into words. God's word is not silent about the cries from that place. We read this: *Why did the wicked get away with despising God? They think God will never call us to account. But you see the trouble and grief they cause. You take note of it and punish them. The helpless put their trust in you. You defend the orphans, Lord. You know the hopes of the helpless. Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them.*

There is a part of me, honestly, in my humanity where I kind of want to ask God why he didn't simply intervene and stop it. Like you, I'm grateful that he hears the cries of those suffering, but wouldn't a God of love want to prevent the suffering in the first place? I honestly don't have adequate answers for that. I don't know why God allows certain evil to continue, other than that we are living in a broken world full of sin. And I know, too, that from before the very first human cry, there was a plan in place to rescue us. And knowing the loving heart of God, I can only imagine the pain that you're suffering causes him.

I know that we are called to live by faith and not by what we see or what makes sense to us. It will cost us to be a disciple. I have never been more convinced of how we need to grasp hold of this truth. It will cost us to be true followers of Jesus. Think about it. We're not joining a club when we become a Christian. We are joining a radical, die-to-yourself kingdom. The "Give your heart to Jesus and life will work out perfectly" message that maybe you've often heard preached is not only damaging but is totally against what the Word of God teaches.

Remember what Jesus said to his closest friends? "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth, you will have many trials and sorrows, but take heart because I have overcome the world." Following Christ is not a walk in the park, but we

are never ever alone, and he stepped into our suffering.

2020 highlighted for us that everything can change in a moment. Things we knew for sure one day, they had simply gone by the next. The things we counted as normal, such as getting together with our family at Christmas or birthdays, were no longer a right. They were a privilege, at times, with very specific guidelines and restrictions. People lost jobs, homes, loved ones, financial security, and so much more. At my lowest point in that year, I made a fresh commitment to dive deep into the Word of God and know for 100 percent sure what has not and will not change.

A steady diet of the evening news and the craziness of social media will give birth to anxiety and fear. But a steady diet of the promises of God will give us a solid place to stand, no matter what else is shaking. So let's take a look at what God has promised and how those promises relate to your life right now.

As you know, some human promises are conditional or dependent on circumstances or made to spare someone's feelings. Like, will I lose weight on this plan? Yeah, I promise you will if you stick to it. Will you be coming home for Christmas? I promise I will if I can. So do I look fat in these pants? Yeah, we'll leave that one for the Lord. [Laughing] It's so important not to put God's promises into the same category as anything that's ever been promised to you before.

I want you to hear this. God's promises are 100 percent trustworthy, 100 percent of the time. They're not conditional. They don't depend on circumstances, and they are true. The promises of God depend on God himself, and he cannot lie. In Second Corinthians chapter one, verse 20, we read this: For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "yes" in Christ. They don't always make sense to us in our timeline, but never ever allow that to make you doubt that you can trust the promises of God. Do you know that there are over 7,000 promises in the Bible? But for our purposes here today, I want us to look at three of those. Those promises hold us when we are struggling to hold on by ourselves.

Promise number one: Nothing can separate us from God's love. Let's just start with what could arguably be called the most important promise of all: The promise of the love of God. When Paul wrote to the church in Rome, he said, *"And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love."*

The intent of the Greek word here translated as "convinced" has a much bigger story to tell us. It's written in the Greek perfect tense, and it can be understood as, "I have become and I remain convinced." This is very significant for you and me. Paul is saying to us that when he came into a relationship with Christ if you don't remember that story, you can read it in Acts, chapter nine. Very dramatic conversion! Well, yeah! Sure! He was convinced that nothing and no one could ever separate him from God's love.

But now, as he is writing for the church in Rome, it is almost 20 years later. And Paul writes this letter having been through some devastating times and makes the statement that he is still absolutely convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love. It would be easy for Paul in the first flush of relationship with Jesus to make such a statement. He actually came face to face with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus; blinded by the light of Christ's presence, he asked this question, "Who are you, Lord?"

And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you're persecuting."

From that dramatic conversion, he was all in, sold out to Christ. Life for Paul from that moment on was one challenge after another.

Do you remember he was beaten? He was imprisoned? He was stoned and left for dead. Starved, shipwrecked, having walked through all of that, he speaks to us today, and he says, "I'm still convinced! There is nothing that can separate us from God's love." Not divorce, not cancer, not bankruptcy, not failure, not self of doubt, not betrayal, not COVID. Add your own story in there -- there is nothing in heaven or earth or under the earth that can separate us from God's love. That is a promise.

Promise number two: Everything will work out for our good. One of the things that bring anxiety and make us panic is when life feels out of control. If we live with the conviction that because God loves us, he will orchestrate the details of our life in a way that makes sense to us. Many, many times, as you probably know, we will be disappointed and maybe disillusioned. More than that, we'll be tempted to believe things have gone terribly wrong. Because Romans 8:28 is one of the most quoted verses of scripture, but it is also one of the least understood. I want us to look: *And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

In a quick read, it can sound as if everything will be good and feel good to those who love God. But that's not what the text says. When we read on, we get a better understanding: For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his son so that his son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. The purpose of our lives in the best days and the worst is to become more like Jesus. That's the whole goal of our lives; to become more like Jesus.

The promise of Romans 8:28 is that no matter what happens to us, God will bring good from it. It doesn't say that everything is good because clearly everything is not. But nothing is wasted by God. You have not wept one single tear that fell to the ground unnoticed.

One of the steps in my own healing has been thanking God for that promise. And because of it, I consciously brought all the broken pieces to him, my father's suicide, my depression, my month in a psych hospital, my failures at times as a wife and a mom, and I've laid it all at his feet and thanked him for his promise. He's promised he'll bring good.

Would you do that? Would you, as an act of faith, bring all the parts of your story to God and thank him that he has promised to bring good from everything. I love how Warren Wiersbe says this: *"Living by faith means obeying God's word in spite of feelings,*

circumstances, or consequences. It means holding on to God's truth no matter how heavy the burden or how dark the day, knowing that he is working out his perfect plan." Here's the bit I love: *"It means living by promises and not by exclamations."*

So, we're held by the powerful promise of the love of God. We're held by the promise that he will bring good from everything for those who love him and are called according to his purpose. But if you're feeling a little worn out today, let's look at one final promise, promise three: God will give us new strength. *But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength.*

I love this whole verse as it is translated in the Amplified version of the Bible. *But those who wait for the Lord, [who expect, look for, and hope in him] will gain new strength and renew their power. They will lift up their wings [and rise up close to God] like eagles rising toward the sun. They will run and not become weary; they will walk and not grow tired.*

To wait means to hope, to look for God in everything. I have become like a God stalker. I talk to him all the time. I read his word. I meditate on his promises trusting that he's holding me. The more I know about God, the bigger he is. It actually reminds me of one of my favorite lines from one of C.S. Lewis's children's books. It's actually from Prince Caspian. It is a dialogue between Aslan, representing Christ, and Lucy, the youngest of the three children.

Here's how it goes. *"Aslan," said Lucy, "you're bigger!"*

"That's because you are older, little one," said he.

"Not because you are?"

"I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger."

Wow! Every year we grow closer to the Lord, the bigger and bigger and bigger he is in our lives. So let's just remember promise one: Nothing can separate you from God's love. Promise two: Everything will work out for your good! Promise three: God will give you new strength. These are your promises. And you can stake your life on them.

One of the things I love most about being part of the *LIFE Today* family is that we get to make a difference in the lives of others. It's like the bigger our picture of God becomes, the clearer our vision becomes to see those who desperately need help. And then we're given the privilege of being able to say, hey, count me in. I want to be part of the answer.

I'll never forget one of my first trips to Africa, where I began to see that life for so many mothers is not like the life I enjoyed when my little boy was just a baby. It's very different, and I think you and I could do something about that. Would you watch this?

On the mission field

Announcer: If you've ever missed a meal or two you probably know the feeling of hunger pains and the relief that your next meal brings. But sadly, there are those who live with the pain of hunger every single day of their life. And then there are children who do not survive once they move beyond the pain of hunger. Veronica is reminded of her little brother dying from a lack of food every day that she has to go without food.

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

Announcer: Veronica's story is all too common in villages throughout southern Africa and that's what makes this so urgent that we do something now.

Sheila: Some of these moms have to walk 10-15 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.

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: I've been a faithful follower of the ministry, of *LIFE Today*, for many years, long before I had the privilege of becoming part of the family. I'd watch these pieces and be deeply moved. But the time I took my first trip to Angola, I got a whole different idea of just the vastness of this issue. Because I'm thinking, well, there's the clinic, and so, if mothers need some help, they can come to the clinic. But they're so far apart. So many of the villages that we go to are very remote; we will drive for hours and hours. And then when we come to a village, we will ask the village chief for permission to put up our little tents there.

I've watched these mothers go out early in the morning. Sometimes, they'll start at 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning to try and dig in the ground, which is just so barren, so dry to find something to give to their children. Then, when they realize that one of their little ones is just slowly disappearing before their eyes, they will walk mile after mile after mile to get to a malnutrition clinic. That's true of that mom. Can you imagine carrying your little one? There are no cars or bikes. She is carrying her little one to a clinic, and before she gets there, her little one dies in her arms. It's a desperate situation. First time in the malnutrition clinic, I remember that night just laying on my face just sobbing. Then, I felt the Lord say to me, "Sheila, get up and wash your face and do something about this."

So that's what I'm asking you to do today. We have made a commitment to our partners who are on the ground right now that we will feed 350,000. That sounds like a lot, but here's how it breaks down. If you could give \$30, that will feed three children for three months. \$50 will feed five children for three months. \$100 will feed ten children. And if

you're able to give \$1,000, that will feed 100 children.

Hope comes in a bowl in Southern Africa, and these bowls, what we put in, it looks a little bit, the first time I saw it, it looked like oatmeal. I asked if I could taste it before I handed it out to the children. It is a special recipe made up specifically for what these children in this part of the world need. There's protein and vitamins, everything that will build them up. Because in these countries, when a child gets sick, and it could be something as simple as a tummy ache or a cold, they have zero resistance, and so often, those children succumb, and they don't survive.

But we have made a commitment here at LIFE that we will not forget their faces; we will not forget their voices. So I'm asking you today, I'm asking you, will you join us? Will you help us? Will you call that number on the screen? Will you give just the very best gift you can? Let's make sure we get to these children before they ever end up in a malnutrition clinic.

Begin video clip:

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 lifesaving 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. This urgent need is \$392,000 above our normal feeding budget and is critical to help save the lives of those suffering most.

With your gift of any amount, we will send you *Christmas Grace*. This eye-opening, new 31-day devotional will give you a fresh perspective on the greatest gift ever given and the life-transforming hope found in Christ's birth.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "Love and Thanks" tumbler set with scriptures reminding us that "God's love never fails" and to always "Give thanks." These tumblers will keep drinks hot or cold wherever you go.

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

Begin video clip:

DAVID: "A thrill of hope," the carol writer called the announcement of Jesus' birth. Hi, I'm David Holland, author of *Christmas Grace*; 31 meditations and declarations on the greatest gift ever given.

I'm thrilled beyond words to know that as you partner with *LIFE Today* to bring nutrition and hope to those who are in such desperate need, that you'll receive my newest devotional as an expression of their profound thanks.

I believe with all my heart that if you'll request this devotional and follow it through the holidays, right up to the new year, you'll come away with new insights about the birth of the Savior and a deeper love for him. You'll feel that thrill of hope. So share it and request your copy today, and may God bless you richly for extending hope and life to others.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Thank you so much! And for any gift at all, you can request my book, *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*, and dig more, dig deeper into some of those promises from God.

The other thing that we're very concerned about is the severe flooding in South Sudan; 16 of those malnutrition clinics have been literally washed away. So we've told our partners on the ground that we will rebuild these clinics. For one clinic, it costs \$24,500, and that will equip and staff it so that when mothers walk for miles the clinic is there.

I love that we get to do this together. Thank you so much for being with us. And we will see you next time on *LIFE Today*! God bless you!