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Week Four: WFL

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"Held by Christ"

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. Let me ask you a question. If I just give you the word *miracles*, what comes to your mind? Like how would you define a miracle? You might be tempted to go to what we read about in scripture, the kind of miracles that Christ performed. Or perhaps it is something God has done in your own life that you think only God could have done that. That was a miracle! I just wanted to share some thoughts with you today about how I see miracles differently than I used to.

So I was invited to sing at a youth convention in Hawaii. The guest speaker was an evangelist from Africa. When he took the stage on the second night of the conference, he made a stunning statement. He told the crowd that God had made it clear to him that every single sick person with any kind of infirmity present that night was going to be healed. You could sense the level of faith rise in the room.

I was scanning the crowd for one person. I'd met him the previous evening; I'll call him John. John had been in a wheelchair for 15 years following a devastating car crash, and I was so excited at the thought of John being able to stand up out of his wheelchair and walk. After the evangelist's message, he began to pray for people, and the tent was packed and noisy. A lot of people had come up to the front of the stage, so I couldn't actually see where John was. Well, at the conclusion of the prayer time, the evangelist was immediately escorted off the platform, out of the tent, and into a waiting car. And I waited, and I waited, and the tent finally emptied.

The only two people who remained were John and me. I walked over to his wheelchair with tears in my eyes. He said, "Don't be sad, Sheila. I know God could have healed me,

but until he does, I'll worship him from here."

"I'll worship him from here." The greatest miracle I saw that night was the faith of John. His faith was not in what he saw or experienced personally; his faith was in Christ alone. He knew without question that God could heal him, but he didn't love him less because he didn't. Neither was he angry with the evangelist for promising something that didn't take place, although I have to admit, I was. I think if you tell people so definitively that God is going to do something and it doesn't happen, you should at least have the decency to look them in the eyes and say, "You know what? I was wrong."

John didn't need or want that. His hope was in Christ, not in a physical miracle. He wasn't holding on to the miracle; he was holding on to the miracle worker. As we talked late into the night, I saw in him that despite 15 years of broken dreams and suffering, he knew a depth of companionship with his wounded savior that I was yet to discover. I was standing, but he was being held by the God of miracles.

Here's something that might sound a little controversial. I don't believe that miracles change our lives; they are a welcome invasion from heaven. And honestly, if you need one right now, I pause here and join my heart and prayers with you and ask that it be done in Jesus' name.

The hard thing about television is that it is one-sided. I can't hear your voice. I can't hear your "amen" or your "What did you mean by that?" Or your "I don't agree with you." So let me do my best to unpack what I believe. When I say that miracles don't change our lives, this is what I mean. How many times have you heard or read of someone saying, God, if you'll just do this, I'll follow you for the rest of my life? Or I'll never touch another drink if you get me out of this. Often, when God comes through in miraculous ways, promises are forgotten.

Think about those who witnessed Christ's miracles on earth. Many people saw them with their own eyes, and then they walked away. The most remarkable event that illustrates

this point is recorded in John's gospel. It's the story of Lazarus. You can read the first part of the story in John chapter 11, verses 1-32.

But I want us to be there on the day when Jesus arrived in Bethany, where Lazarus had been in his tomb for four days. Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were some of Jesus' closest friends. So when Jesus saw the sisters' profound grief, he was deeply moved.

When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled. "Where have you put him?" He asked them. They told him, "Lord, come and see." Then Jesus wept. The people who were standing nearby said, "See how much he loved him!" But some said, "This man healed a blind man. Couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?" Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across the entrance. "Roll the stone aside," Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man's sister, protested, "Lord, he's been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible!"

We understand Christ's tears for those he loved, but why was he angry? The word used in the original Greek is the same word used for that guttural snort of a stallion about to stampe. Jesus was angry that death had ever invaded life. This was never God's original plan for us. Jesus knew that in just days he would face the cross, and in rising again would defeat death forever. But his friend had died, and his fury as he faced the tomb was fierce.

I wonder, too, as he stared at the stone if he thought about what lay just ahead for him. This one miracle stands alone. Jesus had previously brought two people back to life, but both had been dead for only a day. I'll explain why that's so significant in a moment. One was the only son of a widow; you can read about that in Luke chapter seven. The other was the 12-year-old daughter of Jairus, a leader in the synagogue. You can read that story in Luke chapter eight. Clearly, those were significant miracles, but such occurrences were not unprecedented. If you were a Jew living in Israel at the time of Christ, your

understanding of death would have been very different from ours because Jewish people did not believe in embalming bodies; people were buried the day they died.

Two things contributed to this significance of the fact that Lazarus had been dead for four days. First, at times, people who had been placed in their burial tombs subsequently revived a few hours or a day later. They had been in a coma or in some other medical condition that made it appear as if they had died. Or, to protect against anyone being buried alive, someone would be on guard outside the tomb for three days listening for any sound at all.

Secondly, Jewish mourning tradition taught that when a person dies, the soul or neshama hovers around the body for three days deciding whether to return or not. By the fourth day, the soul had permanently departed. So to everyone gathered outside the tomb that day, one thing was crystal clear, Jesus didn't come when he got the message that Lazarus was sick, and now -- now it's too late.

When we read Lazarus's story, it seems strange at first that when Jesus hears that Lazarus is ill, he waits where he is for two days before he makes the one-day walk back to Bethany. Why wouldn't he come when he could have prevented Lazarus's death? I would imagine that the whole point is that no one could bring someone who had been dead for four days back to life. No one had ever witnessed that. It would be a miracle beyond miracles.

So, imagine that you and I are there that day, standing at the tomb with Mary and Martha and all the other mourners. We can't believe what happens after they roll the stone away. *Then Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in grave clothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him go!"*

Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen. But some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

Do you see the crowds' mixed reactions? Many believed, but some reported Jesus to those who wanted to have him killed. That is just astonishing to me. They just saw with their very own eyes that Christ had to be the promised Messiah for who else but God could perform such a miracle? But it wasn't enough to change the hearts.

A miracle might change our circumstances, but worshipping from a wheelchair, from a sickbed, from the place of broken dreams changes our hearts. That's only possible for you and me because of Jesus. Jesus changed everything. If Christ's story had ended on the cross, then we'd have no reason to hope. He would have been a good, kind man, a wonderful teacher. But we would still be lost and alone.

But fortunately, the story was far from over. The largest piece of humanity's puzzle that's been missing since sin entered the world in the Garden of Eden was about to be put in place once and for all. You'll remember early on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb with spices and ointments for Christ's bruised and bloodied body only to discover that the stone had been rolled away. She ran as fast as she could to tell the disciples.

So we read that: *Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but John loves to tell us that he got there first. He stooped and looked in, and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. But then when Simon Peter arrived, he went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings.*

I read this fascinating Jewish folktale about the significance of the cloth that had covered Jesus' head being folded. Supposedly, there was a tradition between a master and a servant. If a master was finished eating, he would wad up the napkin as a way of saying he was done. If it was neatly folded, it meant he was coming back. I love this story, but I've not been able to really authenticate and verify it in any Jewish literature. But Jesus, however, made no secret of the truth that he was coming back.

Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later, he would rise from the dead.

So here's what I know. It's true for me, and it's true for you. It's only on Sunday that Friday makes sense. Think about it. On Friday morning, nothing made sense. For those who loved and followed Jesus for three years, all their hopes hung on the cross that day. I mean, they must have thought, what happened? What went wrong? Perhaps some of the watching crowd wondered if there would still be a miracle. If he was who he says he was, would angels come down and rescue him? So they watched, and they waited. And then they heard these words, *"It is finished."* Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Finished! After everything he said, after everything he did, it was over? Well, that was Friday. But then Sunday came. I can't imagine what that day must have been like for the women at the tomb. Jesus was gone! They had watched him die. But now, he was alive? How do you even begin to process that? That is the one miracle that you and I cannot live without. That is the miracle that changed everything.

One of the questions that I get asked more often than any other regarding my diagnosis of clinical depression is: Are you fixed yet? I remember being a guest on a radio show in Los Angeles, and that was the very first question, "Are you fixed, and how long did it take for them to fix you?" It made me smile. I assured the listener that if I ever was fixed, I'd come back on the show and let them know, and we both kind of laughed. But then I told them that the truth was simple. I'm not fixed. It's way better than that; I'm redeemed, I'm rescued, I'm being held by the one who changed everything.

So let me just say this to you. If you are in a Friday place, hold on because Sunday is coming! That's what we are promised as faithful followers of Christ. Not that we will have no trouble. Jesus made that so clear: "In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

I don't know what you are facing in your personal life right now. I don't know what kind of storms there are, but I want to remind you that our story does not end on Good Friday. Our story really begins on Easter Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the dead.

Then he said to his followers, and he says to you, and he says to me, "I'm going to prepare a place for you." We have so many promises from God's word. He has promised in the last chapter of Hebrews: You will never be alone; I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. He has promised the gift of his peace. "My peace I will leave with you." Not as the world gives. The peace that Jesus gives means that even right now, if you're in the middle of a storm and you don't know what tomorrow is going to bring, if you don't know how you're going to pay your bills, or if you don't know what's happening with your children or where they are, even now you can pause in his presence and receive his peace.

The wonderful thing about the example that Jesus set for you and me while he was on this earth was that he showed us how to pray when it is hardest to pray. That night when Christ was betrayed, when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane, he poured out his pain in the presence of his Father.

Sometimes we think when we're going through a tough time, we just have to kind of grit our teeth and get through it because we don't want to say anything that sounds disrespectful. But I've discovered the joy of pouring out your pain but in the presence of your Father. I think it is interesting that it's the only time in scripture that Jesus addresses his Father by that most personal and intimate "Abba Father." If you've ever been to Israel, you'll hear children running around the marketplace calling out in Arabic, "Abba, Abba!" Calling on their daddy! And that's what Jesus did.

Here's the truth. Right now, if you are willing to pour out your pain in the presence of your Father, you will discover that just as happened to Christ in the garden that night, you've made space for grace. You get to tell the truth. You don't have to pretend you're

okay. It's okay not to be okay. But don't isolate from God when you're hurting. Tell him everything and open up your heart.

I would love to be able to send you my book, *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*. I wrote it during one of the most difficult times during the whole pandemic when I thought, Lord, I don't know how I'm going to survive this. It seemed so bleak and so dark. But I learned the joy of being held by the God of miracles, of being held by the one who changed everything. And I would love to send you a copy.

But first of all, I would like to ask you to join us here at *LIFE Today* in making a significant impact on some people who are barely holding on by a thread right now. And they're not asking for a lot; they're just asking and praying that someone will be able to come and provide clean drinking water. They're praying it right now, and you and I get to be the answer. Watch this.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: A mother's love for her children can be seen in many ways as she cares for them. When they run and play, it brings a smile to her face. But for Hanh Mun, there are no smiles, only fading memories like these clothes that once belonged to her five children who died because of waterborne illnesses.

Open Captions

>> I feel so sad because my children died, and I can't see them again.

ANNOUNCER: Hanh Mun had seven children in all. Her fifth child was just a baby when waterborne illness took its life. The pain is still with her.

Open Captions

>> My baby got sick very fast with fever and diarrhea and then died. I feel so hopeless. I lost something very important to me. I tried everything to help my baby.

ANNOUNCER: When asked what she hoped for in the future for her two remaining children, Hanh Mun had a very simple request.

Open Captions

>> If I had clean water, it would be a joy, and then my family might not get sick and die.

ANNOUNCER: We can help make Hanh Mun's plea become a reality by drilling a freshwater well. And by doing so, all the mothers in her village can experience the joy of having clean water for their children.

In the studio

SHEILA: I can't imagine that kind of pain, can you? Burying five children? And there must be, as I think about it, there must be some guilt involved too because as a mom, that's what you're giving your children, is the only thing you have. And the very thing, water that should bring life, is the thing that comes so often with a death sentence.

I have walked beside these moms, and I've walked to the only water source they have. And sometimes, they have to get up at 4:00 in the morning and walk for at least an hour to get to some hand-dug well or whatever water source is available, and it is filthy and contaminated, but it is the only thing they have.

Twenty-three years ago, James and Betty Robison said, "No more! We're going to do something about this." So we have been drilling wells. Do you know that over the years, many of you have helped us drill 7,000 wells that provided clean drinking water for over seven million people? But the need is so great. 800 million people right now in the world have no access to clean drinking water.

Well, we at *LIFE* are determined we're going to do our part. So our commitment this year is to drill 350 new wells in 20 nations. I want to ask you to help us. If you're able to give

\$48, that will provide clean drinking water for ten people. If you're able to do more, perhaps \$144, that will provide clean drinking water for 30. And if you think, you know what? I think my family, my extended family, my small group, and I think we could drill a whole well by ourselves. That's \$4800, and that will provide clean drinking water for 1,000 people.

Would you go to your phone and just do what you can? Let's make sure that moms like that don't have to bury one more child. It is such a simple thing they're asking for. They're not asking for something fancy, a new car or an iPhone. All they want is to be able to provide clean water for their children. We call it Water for LIFE because the wells literally will last for about the lifetime of someone in a village. But it's also Water for LIFE because Jesus is living water. So I think when we care for them, when we care for their children, we've earned the right to share who sent us.

So please, join us. If you've done it before, would you do it again? Would you say I want to do something more? So please, call that number on your screen right now. Don't wait. Just give the best gift you can because if we all do that, we will meet this need and be able to bring you some happy stories of the difference it has made. Thank you so much.

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 *Bible Promises For Life*, the ultimate handbook to everything God guarantees you in his word. A powerful resource that will give you the confidence to face life's troubles. With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the "I Will Give You Rest" throw. It is a reminder of our Savior's promise of rest to those who trust in His grace and love.

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. You may request our new, inspiring bronze sculpture, "Let the Children Come."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

On the mission field:

Randy: Many of these precious children behind me have lost siblings, playmates to waterborne illnesses. We can stop that cycle of death. It's as simple as giving them a cup of clean drinking water. Do you know each water well will serve about an average of 1,000 people? Look at all of these kids behind me. We can reach into areas – this area and so many more just like it and save thousands of lives just by giving them clean drinking water. I pray you'll do what you can right now. Go to the phone. Go online. Make the best gift you can. And when you do, know that you'll be saving precious lives all around the world with water for life!

End of video

SHEILA: Thank you so much! If you've tried to get through and the line was busy, please keep calling. And for any gift at all, I would love to send you my new book, *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*. We have other gifts that it would be our privilege to send to you. I know that's not why you do it, but it is our way of simply saying thank you.

So do whatever you can. This is something that we get to do in Jesus' name. It is not something that we want to guilt you into. It is simply opening up a need and saying, here's the need, here's

how we can be an answer to their prayer. So if you can give \$48, wonderful! If you can drill a whole well for \$4800, that's amazing! So thank you so much for being such faithful partners with us here at *LIFE*. We love you, and we'll see you next time.