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Week six: WFL

Sheila Walsh

"Let Go -- You're Being Held"

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. Last year I wrote a book called *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*: "Clinging to hope when life is falling apart." Part of the reason I wrote it was that halfway through 2020, as we were kind of in the pandemic, by that point, I found myself really spiraling again. I was diagnosed several years ago with severe clinical depression, and I found myself really struggling with that again. And began to ask the Lord, how do we live in these days? So that's actually why I wrote that book. That's just the lessons God told me and showed me and helped me understand. But I discovered something that I thought was kind of interesting toward the end. Sometimes, holding on and letting go is like silent partners, puzzle pieces that surprisingly fit perfectly together.

I've told you before that my husband Barry is an extrovert. What I didn't disclose is his obsession with chimpanzees. And that became abundantly apparent one day when we took our son Christian to an amusement park in Florida. I served at that time on an advisory board with one of the senior officials at the park, and he had been kind enough to give us special passes to the rides and the shows.

Well, Christian was especially excited to see the animal actor show. As we took our seats before the show began, a young employee told us that we were chosen to participate with some of the animals if we were comfortable with that. We assured him, yes, we were! It was really a great show. I remember a magnificent macaw flew over the audience and landed on Christian's shoulder. And then he was invited onto the platform to throw balls to two adorable dogs who would do all sorts of tricks.

So far, so good! Until the chimpanzee appeared. The trainer asked Barry if he would like to hold Bubbles. Well, I thought my husband might literally weep with joy as Bubbles wrapped his arms around his neck and gave him a big kiss on his cheek. The chimp then put his hat on Barry's head, and the audience laughed and clapped. Well, then it was time to give Bubbles back. Barry didn't move. He held on to that chimp as if they were on the Titanic and it was going down. The trainer actually signaled to Barry to bring Bubbles back to the platform. Barry simply waved back. He didn't move. "It is time to give him back," I whispered to him. Eventually, the trainer pried Barry's arms off his furry new best friend, and he had to let go.

In the cab ride back to the hotel, Christian asked his dad, "Dad, did you not know you would have to actually give the chimp back?" "I did," he said. "I just wanted to hold on for a little longer."

I know that feeling. I feel that way when I hug my son before he goes back to grad school. I always want to hold on just a little longer. But there are times in life where we have no choice but to let go of things that we felt would always be there. I mean, it could be a relationship, a marriage, a home, a career, something that we absolutely counted on, something that we felt in many ways defined us. These losses can shake us to our core as if a tsunami has hit our foundation and nothing looks the same anymore. In times like that, we want to know, "God, do you see me? Do you see what's happening here? Can you hear my prayers?"

I received an email last year from someone I'd never met before; his name is Gordon Dasher. The heading on this email was "Your impact on my aging father." He began his note with the sad news that his dad had passed away just a few days earlier from COVID. He was 88 years old. Well, Gordon shared some of the issues he and his dad had struggled with throughout the years. That after his dad's passing, he found a note on his father's refrigerator that helped him see that God had been working all along.

It was actually a quote from a book of mine that his dad had typed out and taped where

he could see it every day on his refrigerator. So I wrote to Gordon to thank him for being kind enough to let me know. And a few days later, he responded, and I discovered that he's Phil Robertson's, from *Duck Dynasty*, brother-in-law. I love the whole family. Miss Kay is a good friend of mine.

Gordon wrote that the main reason he was not ready to let his dad go was that they had unfinished business. So I asked him if I could share a little of his story with you, and he said yes. He wrote that his mother had fallen and suffered a serious brain bleed a year or so ago. His dad's lifelong passion for being in control was fanned into flames. She couldn't make a move without him chastising her for doing something dangerous, and he became harsh in the way he spoke to her and others.

Gordon writes, "At first I was angry with him, but then I began to see his behavior for what it was. He was afraid. He'd always been a take-charge guy, but now he couldn't manage what was wrong with mom. He couldn't try, and it was it driving him absolutely nuts that he couldn't fix it." So Gordon said, "I did what I didn't want to do. I confronted him about it. I challenged him to relinquish control and allow God to manage my mom's welfare. I encouraged him to enjoy his time with her. Yes, I was worried that I would become a casualty of his anger, but he did the unexpected. He listened to me. Until the day after his funeral, I didn't know how much he had listened. When I visited him at Thanksgiving, I noticed a quote he had typed out and glued to the refrigerator."

I guess he hadn't heard of magnets. "Unfortunately, at the time, I only read the first line: Be still and know that I am God. I wish now that I'd taken the time to read it in its entirety while he was healthy. I wish I could have told him how proud I was of him. The crudely-typed quotations were from a blogger named Sheila Walsh. I'd never heard of her, but I emailed her to thank her. Her words changed my father's life."

This was the full quote that his dad had typed out and had glued to their refrigerator: Be still and know that I am God. The original Hebrew root of "be still" doesn't mean be quiet; it means to let go. That's very different, don't you think? Let go and know that I am

God. Let go of trying to control your spouse. Let go of your worry about your finances. Let go of your unforgiveness. Let go of your past. Let go of what you can't control and rest in knowing that God is in control.

Well, Gordon wrote, "There it was. All I ever wanted to know about my dad's heart. And as it turns out, his heart was what I'd always hoped it would be. I hadn't been sure he had listened to me this past summer but on his fridge, for all to see was all the encouragement that I could ever want. He had listened to me. More specifically, he had listened to God. I saw glimpses of it over the last 20 years or so, but Sheila Walsh's quote will comfort me for the rest of my life because my dad had made it his own. God had spoken to him, and he listened."

What a gift to a son! I love that Gordon thought that I was a blogger. I don't think I've ever blogged in my life. I love that he had never heard of me. He was just a kind man who wanted to let a stranger know that she had touched his dad's life. But way, way more than that, I love that God let him see that his father had listened to him and that his father had listened to God. We don't always get those moments in life, but when we do, they're so very sweet. His dad had finally found the grace to let go knowing that he was being held.

But sometimes, in life, that grace comes at the very last minute. Think about this man's story. We don't know much about him. We don't even know his name. We don't really know why he was about to be executed. Some translations call him a thief, others a revolutionary. Whatever he'd done, he knew his life was over. I find myself imagining him sleeping very little the night before the crucifixion, knowing what was waiting for him in the morning. Crucifixion is a barbaric way to die.

I was thinking it was funny. Many of us wear little crosses around our necks; I have one. But to those in that ancient world, that would be as unthinkable as wearing a little electric chair around our necks would be to us. It was the most painful, shame-filled, public way to die.

This is Matthew's account of the story: *Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Look at you now," they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. Well, then if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross."*

The agony of a public execution. Insults were being hurled at Jesus, and it was an angry crowd that day. Both revolutionaries hanging with him were in terrible pain. Yet, in Mark's account and John's, all we read about these two men is that they were there, one on each side of Christ. But it's Luke, it's Luke who lets us in on the last-minute miracle, a moment of grace.

This is what he writes: *One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself -- and us, too, while you're at it!" But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you've been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."*

One of these two men was still holding on to his bitterness, his pain, and his anger. Even in his final moments, he refused to let go of what was tearing him up inside. But what happened to that other man? What did he see in Jesus in the midst of the violence and the pain and the noise? He must have heard the things that Jesus spoke from the cross in the face of a merciless crowd. He heard: *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing."* Whatever happened to him that day, his eyes were opened. He suddenly realized he was being executed beside the only man on earth who could save him, not from the death he was facing but for all eternity.

Can you imagine what that realization must have been approximate like? Think about it. You've ruined your life. You've made bad choice after bad choice, and you've been

caught. There's nothing -- there's nothing you can do to save yourself. Your life is over. And then suddenly, you turn your head, and you're looking into the eyes of the Son of God who is dying beside you.

When he asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom, the man had no idea just how quickly that was going to happen. Theologians argue over whether there should be a comma after today, as in "I assure you today, you will be with me in paradise." Or should it be, "I assure you, today you'll be with me in paradise." As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter a hill of beans. This man, with no time left to live a good life or redeem himself, called on the name of the Lord and was saved. It is never -- it is never too late to turn your head and look into his eyes and be saved. God is a redeemer.

I remember picking apples with my friends when I was about ten years old. I was the best climber, so I was the one up the tree throwing the apples down for my friends to catch. I saw a few perfect ones on a branch that was a little further out than I'd gone before, but they looked so good, so I decided to go for it. As I crept out onto the branch, it began to crack, and I realized I was going to fall.

One of my friends told me to let go, and she'd catch me. As much as I loved her, she was no more than about 65 pounds soaking wet. So I called out, "Anybody else down there?" When you've been told to let go, you need to know that the one who is telling you to let go can and will catch you. He won't let go unless you're totally convinced that you will be caught. That you will be held. I want you to know that when God invites you to let go, you can be sure you will be held. Our God is a rescuer, a deliverer, a tender shepherd. We can let go because we are being held.

I love this beautiful declaration from King David. We find it actually in Second Samuel. This is what it says: *He stood me up on a wide-open field; I stood there saved -- surprised to be loved. God made my life complete when I placed all the pieces before him.* Would you do that? Would you take all the pieces of your life that seem broken and let him do what only he can do?

When my son was just a little boy, he made a kind of, it's like one of those mosaic stones that you can place in your yard. He put all the different pieces of glass, and then he wrote with his little finger, "I love you, Mom." So if you ever come over for a cup of tea, you'll see it in our backyard. It is there for a couple of reasons. One because my son made it, so I'll treasure it forever. Number two is because it's a profound reminder every day when I let my dogs out or take my cup of coffee and sit with my Bible and notebook of the beautiful thing God does with a broken life when you give him all the pieces.

I don't know what the circumstances of your life are today, what it looks like. I don't know what makes you happy. I don't know what makes you sad. I don't know what you think is working or seems too broken. I want you to know that God can take all the broken pieces of your life and make something even more beautiful.

There's a kind of Japanese art called Kintsugi. I have a piece my friend Kay Warren sent me that is an ancient art form that originated hundreds of years ago. When a porcelain bowl that meant a lot to one emperor was broken, they tried to repair it, but he was not happy with it at all. And someone else took all the broken pieces and actually repaired them with gold instead of some kind of glue or paste. They used gold to make the final piece more beautiful and more valuable than the original.

Do you know that's what God wants to do with your life? I know sometimes the enemy can make you feel like you've fallen too far or you've made too many mistakes. So I would like to remind you of Romans chapter eight, verse one says: *There is now, therefore, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Wouldn't it be great to live this whole new year with a fresh understanding of how much we are loved? Of how much we are being held? And that the times when you feel like you're literally just hanging by a thread, to know that there is one underneath you with everlasting arms that will hold you up?

One of our great joys here at LIFE is being able to extend those loving arms to people around the world who are really struggling. They're not looking for a new home or a new car. They're simply looking for a clean water source to give their children. And for them, it literally is the difference between life and death. Would you watch this?

On the mission field

Announcer: Everyone on earth depends on water to live. Where access to clean water is lacking, people either die from thirst or they resort to desperate measures often with tragic results.

Open Captions

>> My name is Virginia. These three are my children. My other children are dead. Their disease was caused by the unclean water. It's the reason my children died. Glorios, she was my daughter. She was six months old when she died. Shadrach was a very strong boy. He was always playing, always catching things, but the day he got sick he couldn't do anything. He was suffering... He was suffering from diarrhea. When I remember Shadrach all I can do is cry.

Announcer: Every child's death is a tragedy. The deaths of Virginia's children are especially painful in that they could have been prevented simply by drilling a clean water well in their village.

Open Captions

>> I fear for this one; now he's sick.

Announcer: We cannot change the past but there are children still alive whose futures hang in the balance and can still be saved if we only choose to act.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Every time we take a trip to Africa, I learn something that I didn't understand before. On our last trip, which was to Zambia, one of the things I realized is how far so many of these mothers have to walk to get *bad* water. It's not as if we walk for a few hours we can get some nice clean water. They walk for an hour, two hours and what they come to is the only source for miles. It's a hand-dug well, usually about six feet deep, and the water is filthy. I didn't even want to stand near the well, honestly, at the beginning. I mean, there are all sorts of flying creatures. There are snakes in it. There's just everything you can imagine. And the water, even when they bring it up in whatever container they have, and they pour it into something for their children to drink, I mean you would be horrified at the color of the water.

But not just that, realizing the disease -- and the most vulnerable are the little ones. So many of the children who die are under five because their immune system is already compromised because they usually don't have adequate food resources either. And so when they do drink this water, and it's contaminated, they get devastating diarrhea. I've talked to so many moms who say when my child got sick, I tried to take them to the nearest clinic. But often, on the way there, that child dies in their arms.

These mothers, they're just like you and me. They're just parents who love their children, and they're asking for our help. This is something that James and Betty have been committed to for years. Our fresh commitment for this year is to drill 350 wells in over 20 nations. That might seem like a lot. To drill one well is \$4800, which actually is amazing. And these wells go down deep to clean water sources, and they'll usually last for about 70 years. So literally, that's why we call it Water for LIFE because it will give water for a whole village for their lifetime.

That's a lot for some of you, but could you do \$48? \$48 would provide clean drinking water for ten. \$144 will give clean drinking water for 30. I've seen the difference it

makes, and for any gift at all, you can request my book *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*. We've lots of things we'd love to send you as a thank you. But I'm asking you, would you do something now? These mothers, so many of them are faithful mothers who get down on their knees at night and pray, God, would you hear our prayer?

You and I have the privilege of being able to respond. The last time I got on a flight to Africa, I picked up a bottle of water at the airport and then thought, this is worth more than gold in Africa. So let's be the answer to their prayers. Would you go online and make the best gift possible? Will you call that number on your screen now, and let's be the answer. Let's bring Water for LIFE in Jesus' name. Thank you.

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

In the studio

SHEILA: Thank you so much! Thanks for watching all the way through. Sometimes, when things are difficult, it is easier to flip the channel, but you didn't, so yay you! Let's do this. What a joy it is to be able to put a water well in a village so that children are laughing and singing, they're not dying. It's literally the difference between life and death.

So if you tried to get through and the lines were busy, please keep calling. For any gift at all, you can request a copy of my book, *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*, which I pray will be an encouragement to you.

So even though you see a couple of us on camera, there's a whole family here who love you and pray for you. I just want to thank you for being with us and say we'll see you next time on *LIFE Today*!