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Week 11: WFL

Sheila Walsh

Anne Neilson

SHEILA: Hey everybody! Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. I'm so, so excited about today's show. I have a picture, a painting hanging in my den, just like this, and it's one of my favorite pieces of art because when I look at it, I feel comforted. For some reason, that's the overwhelming sense, is comforted. So I wanted to see if it was possible to get the artist who painted this to be with us on the show. And she said yes!

Anne, I just want to welcome you so much to *LIFE Today*. Thank you for being here.

ANNE: Thank you for inviting me. Wow! Full circle. What a privilege. I listened to *Blue Waters*, your music, 21 years ago when a group of us got baptized in the Holy Spirit. And that was just the beginning of this journey of painting and worshipping and listening to praise music. You've been such a huge force in my life, your talent and your beauty.

SHEILA: That just blows me away because I wondered, I'm going to tell you how you can get a hold of your own copy of this book because you are going to--because it's a devotional, you're going to want to. But with each piece of work, how do you begin the process?

ANNE: Well, first, I put my headphones on because praise music is truly what each painting is rooted and grounded in. And then I have a blank canvas on my easel. I just let the power of the Holy Spirit work through me. I paint in oils. I've tried others, acrylics and watercolors; oils, you can just...

SHEILA: Texture!

ANNE: And you can mix the colors. It's dreamy. So whether it is three colors on my palette, I'm a very limited palette user, or six, I just allow the Holy Spirit to kind of--I have a vision in my head. People say, do you see angels? I don't know that I've ever seen them but I truly, the words of the music, praying, I pray for every piece on my canvas that I'm painting, just allowing the Holy Spirit to work through.

I think I tell this a lot. There are no two fingerprints alike, there are no two snowflakes alike, and I like to say that there are no two angel wings that I paint that are alike.

SHEILA: Wow! That gives me chills.

ANNE: So yeah, it's just been a process. It started out as such a hobby.

SHEILA: Yeah, I was going to ask you, like have you always been like an artist? In school, were you an artist?

ANNE: I knew when I was in the third grade and young that I wanted to be an artist. In third grade, I wrote this paper on the old paper that had the lines with the red dots so you could learn to write cursive; so third grade, what do you want to be when you grow up? And three sentences: I wanted to be an artist. I also wanted to be a wife and a mom, which I have four beautiful children. I'm married to my husband for 20, almost 28 years. I knew that God gave me that gift and deposited it deep within my spirit and my soul to create. He is the master creator.

It's a long journey of how I got there, but about 19 years ago, I painted this tiny little angel. I sent a picture to my sister, and I said, "What do you think?"

She said, "I think you've found your voice."

SHEILA: I love that!

ANNE: I'm like, okay. It was a hobby. This is such a cool story. Full circle, eight years ago when the first coffee table book came out...

SHEILA: Which I also have.

ANNE: I got to painting to praise music and creating these ethereal beings, but I got an email from Matt Redman.

SHEILA: Oh, wow! British worship artist.

ANNE: Worship artist, listened to his music as well. And he said, "I'm coming out with a new album. I want to change the cover."

I said, "Oh, wow! Which cover?"

And it was the first angel that I ever painted. And it's his album, *Your Grace Finds Me*. I'm like, okay, Lord. Just full circle, just like today is.

I love those divine appointments. There is no coincidence with God and just those nudges that, hey, I'm in the details.

SHEILA: What I love about that, Anne, is like we hear so much bad news at the moment. Even in social media, people are going nuts. I've never heard people so angry or so polarized. But what I get through your work is God is on the move, and he is involved in all areas of our lives.

Now this book is a devotional. I love it. It is very different than any devotional I've ever seen before because you'll choose one word. Where did that idea come from?

ANNE: Well, a lot of hope, prayer. But I do think our words are powerful. When the first

coffee--I keep referring back to the coffee table book. That was just a thought. I wanted to do something so that everybody could have an angel because the angels started growing in value, and people wanted them. And then there are all these incredible stories. So I thought I would put it in a book; that way, people can rip out the page.

SHEILA: And frame it.

ANNE: So one girl got the coffee table book. It sat on her coffee table, which most coffee table books do, and she said, "Six months, I finally opened it, and I started reading it. And it is my new devotional!"

I'm like, well, it's a bit awkward. It's a bit heavy. I need to do a devotional. So I debated and prayed. Is it 365 days? What does this look like? And the Lord, really, our words are powerful. They can either build up, or they can tear down. We landed on words. We landed on the number 40; I think 40 is very significant.

SHEILA: Biblically, it is a very significant number.

ANNE: So we chose 40 words to really hone in. You can choose a word for a week, a day, a year. I'm praying that this is like God's word; that every time you open it, God is going to speak something different to your heart even though you read about love 100 times.

There is a story. One of my closest, dearest friends, a high school friend, she went to go be with Jesus two years ago in June. You talk about close to Jesus and God; she was a rock. But her sister, who is also a dear friend, this was a year later, and every January, she would choose a word. And she's like, "My word this year is going to be dread because I dread going into this year." What it's going to be like without her sister.

SHEILA: All the anniversaries.

ANNE: "So it's going to be dread."

And the Lord said, "No! It's going to be joy."

She's like, "No, no, no. It's going to be dread."

And she had this battle back and forth. She finally conceded to joy. She said, "Anne, if I had not chosen joy, I would have chosen my word *dread*. I would dread going to the grocery store. I would dread getting out of bed."

So it is a choice that we have to make.

SHEILA: That's an act of faith, isn't it?

ANNE: An act of faith! And even though you don't feel like it, the words that we choose can change everything. And so it's been a sweet little devotional.

SHEILA: Have you heard, not like this is even related to this, but what are some of the stories you've heard back from people who received a piece of your work, of the impact it's had on their life? Because it's been huge. I know several stories.

ANNE: It's been powerful. I think early on, a woman called me, and she said, "I got to tell you. I lost my four-year-old granddaughter two years ago, and I have not been able to grieve. I read your book cover to cover, and it's like the floodgates of heaven have opened up, and the healing process has begun."

That's healing and powerful. I do believe that. And I tell a lot of people, when we have open hands and an open heart, allow the Holy Spirit and the Lord to work through us. It's not about us. It's about what he can do. That kind of shifted that conversation early on. This was a hobby.

SHEILA: Didn't you get a D in art in school?

ANNE: I got a D minus in 10th-grade art! It's on my report card! A D minus!

SHEILA: What was wrong with that teacher?

ANNE: I was coloring outside the lines, I think. He wanted me to stay within the lines. So yes, it's on my report card. I show it to my kids a lot. Look! But what God can do. Oh my gosh, he can do immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine.

SHEILA: You know what I think is interesting? The thing I found challenging and encouraging about your work is that God has deposited something in every single one of us. It might not be music. It might not be your giftedness in art, but I think we should all start opening up our hands more and finding how we're--because we compare ourselves to each other.

ANNE: That is the thief of joy! Oh, that is hard. We went on a mission trip; this is with my family a long time ago, and it was a powerful mission trip. Every night we would come back together. What the head of the ministry said, "Everybody has been given something. What is in your hand? What is it? And are you willing to open and surrender it to God and watch what he will do in the midst?" It might not look like what we wanted when we started out, but if we cling to things, and I have a hard time clinging, but it is when I can open my hands and open my heart and surrender, I truly see what he can do. That's how I met my husband; ten dates later, we were married.

SHEILA: Oh my gosh!

ANNE: That's a whole other story!

SHEILA: That's another book!

ANNE: That's surrendering. Quit walking and trying to control God and surrender and truly trust him. Wow!

SHEILA: It changes everything, doesn't it? I found myself wondering as I was reading through. It's like when I write. Sometimes I'll start writing on a passage, like in my last book, I was writing on forgiveness. It suddenly started stirring up something in me, and I realized there was somebody from my past that I had not forgiven. And I had to put everything down, repent, which is not a feeling, it means I change my mind, and I change my direction and ask that person for their forgiveness. When you were coming up with all the words, were there any that hit you in particular?

ANNE: Gosh! Well, one that hits me particularly right now is love. I feel like, and you talked about the toxicity of social media and where our world is right now, I think that that word is so powerful. God is love. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. I feel like how can we be that to the world so that they see Jesus? And I really feel like that is a powerful word. I mean, they're all-powerful. Forgiveness is a huge one! Forgiveness. There are so many things. And that's not just a one-and-done thing. It is daily--but I think between love and forgiveness, those are what this world needs.

SHEILA: I often think we should talk less and love more because we seem to have a lot of words. I don't want to be the kind of person who preaches at people. I want to be the kind of person who sees people and loves people.

ANNE: Yes! And there is that good saying, "Preach the gospel at all times; but, when necessary, use words." So it's our actions.

I really, this is such a crazy story. I was at the grocery store, and it was during COVID, and it was a crazy time. Well, I'm going to try to make this very short, but a woman behind me had three items in her little cart. She said, "Ma'am, would you mind helping me?" And I said, "Yeah!" And she had a little four-year-old boy with her.

I said, "Is that all you need?"

She said, "I'm struggling."

I said, "Let's go shopping. This is your day!"

"No, no, no! I don't really need anything."

I said, "No. Yes, you do." So I got a bigger cart, and we went shopping. And then I said, "You go before me, and I'm going to check you out. I'm going to pay, and then y'all go on."

And the checkout lady was so offended that I paid for her groceries. She left. She goes, "Did you not know her?"

I said, "I did not."

She goes, "You're not supposed to do that. You're not supposed to do that."

I said, "Oh, my gosh! Yes, I am!"

She called the manager over, and then we had these words. I said, "Christine." Her name was Christine. I said, "Listen. When the Holy Spirit tells you to do something, I'm going to act out of obedience."

At the very end, she looked at me, and she's tallying everything up. She goes, "Would you like to round up?"

And I looked at her and said, "Now, what do you think?"

And she just burst out in laughter. I said, "That's what we need. We need more of that!"

SHEILA: But there was grace in your response because you could have got mad.

ANNE: Yes! I just said, "What do you think?" So two days later, I had her on my heart, and I got books. I signed them, I took them in. I forgot my mask. I went in there, and she was at the checkout. I said, "Do you remember me?"

She goes, "I do."

And I just gave her the biggest hug. I said, "These are for you." Anyway, it's just our actions!

SHEILA: Love disarms, doesn't it?

ANNE: Love disarms--love does!

SHEILA: One of the hardest things I ever heard was when my dear friends, Stephen and Mary Beth Chapman lost their precious little girl, Maria. The circumstances of it were just--my husband and I literally sobbed on the floor. But didn't you give them a piece of your art?

ANNE: I did. Because they're one of the ones that I listen to with praise music. And when little Maria Sue passed away, I went into mourning. I was on the floor sobbing. Anything, I want to give everybody everything. I want to give paintings away. I painted this small little painting; it was pastel colors. It was not my typical palate. It sat in my studio for about a month, maybe two months, because I just thought, they're not going to get it. It's not the right colors. But anyway, I found a way because I kept hearing the Holy Spirit nudge me, "Send it. Send it."

So out of an act of obedience, I packed it up. I sent it to a friend of a friend who knew them. Then months later, that was in like August, and this is November, and I'm teaching

a small Bible study. And we're talking about we serve a big God, but we tend to keep him in a small box. And I was telling them the story about Stephen and Mary Beth Chapman and the painting. And I said, "I probably will never hear from them." (Small God)

We wrapped up the Bible study, and I got in my car, and I started going through my emails. And there was an email from Grace, their assistant. There was an email from Mary Beth saying, "Oh my gosh, we about dropped this painting when we got it. The colors are the exact same colors of our home, and little Maria Sue always wore her hair tussled in a red ponytail just like the painting." The little girl had a little tussled ponytail with red.

I sat there because I went through this journey, am I supposed to paint? Am I doing this? Am I really hearing you, Lord? Questioning. Just talked about we serve a big God. And I'm sitting there just bawling, just forgive me, Lord. Forgive me when I don't trust you.

And we've become really close friends. They're so incredible. We own a gallery, so we had Stephen and Mary Beth come, and we had a night "Unplugged," and we raised money for Show Hope. And then, just this past October, in the midst of COVID, we had 25 couples for this B.Y.O.B.: Bring your own blanket under the stars in my backyard. I think we raised close to \$70,000 with 25 couples.

Just to see what God has done and how he just weaves and connects his people together for a higher purpose.

SHEILA: As you can tell, we'll need to have her back. I could talk to this woman for hours and hours. But I want to tell you how you can get a hold of Anne's book. But I want to ask you first if you would do something, if you would stand beside us and ask the Lord to wash your eyes so that you see those who have a need. Maybe like you've never seen them before. Would you watch this?

On the mission field:

TAMMY: When you lose someone you love unexpectedly, it can feel like your whole world is falling apart. It's almost too much to bear. If you know my story, you know I lost my husband in 2001 in a tragic scuba diving accident. I'd give just about anything to go back in time and stop that from happening. While I know God has never abandoned me, I've learned some memories stay with you for the rest of your life.

Recently in East Africa, I got to visit people with some very fresh memories, people who lost loved ones of their own. And in a way, I feel connected to them. My husband died in the water, and her husband died because of water and the lack of good clean water. Because the water they need to drink every day in order to live, well, it's killing them. Water that looks like this--and this. Water that looks like this.

These precious people don't have a choice in the water they drink. Right now, it is this, or it's nothing. But you and I have a choice, a life and death choice. Not life and death for us but for them. So will you please choose to partner with *LIFE Outreach* today? Will you help give Water for LIFE so that we can give them water like this.

[Talking and Laughter]

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: And that's the way children should be. They should be laughing, they should be healthy, they should have the energy to run--they should be children. But in many of the places we've gone, just as our darling Tammy Trent showed you there, the only option for some parents is to give their children filthy water. I can't imagine what that's like.

I've had the privilege of going to different parts of Africa, Cambodia, many of the countries where we drill water wells. The first time, honestly, I was there, it just

overwhelmed me. It was too much. I remember that night going back to this little lodge where we were staying, and I literally laid down on the carpet, and I sobbed.

But you know I felt the Holy Spirit say to me, "Sheila, get up, dry your eyes, and let's do something about this." That's what we're committed to here at *LIFE*. That's been the vision that James and Betty have carried for years.

So here's what we want to do this year. We want to drill 350 new wells in over 20 nations. I've been there. It was amazing to go from watching a mother get this filthy water, then she takes me to the place where she's buried her little girl because she died of waterborne illness.

But then we happen to come upon a place where they were drilling a well. And it just, and watching the children, their delight as the water began to spurt out of the ground--and it was clean water! And then to actually find one of the wells that say, "Placed here by the friends of *LIFE Outreach International*." I probably took 50 photographs of that one well because it was just so beautiful. And you did that! You did that! So let's do it again.

I want to send you this stunning book! But today is the only day we're going to make it available to you. For a gift of \$48 will give clean water to ten people for their lifetime. So I want you to call today and say, "I want to get Anne's book." I mean, it's beautiful! It will just speak to you over and over again. It will be an act of worship. Anne's paintings sing. But they sing about the glory of God. They sing of hope. They sing of strength. They just--they sing!

So will you help us do that? We've made this commitment to drill 350 wells. And hopefully, soon, we get to be back on the road in these countries. I'm longing to go back and see what your gifts have done. We will bring the footage back, and we will show you the joy in these children--, and the burden has been lifted off these moms who get up so early and go to the little hand-dug wells where the water is filthy, and the animal's dung falls into it. It's just a nightmare! But we can change that into a dream. Please, would you

call now?

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."

This is the last week! Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: Don't you see what a wonderful opportunity this is? This isn't something we

have to do. We get to be the hands and feet of Jesus, to those people who, all they're asking for is clean water. That's all! And remember, for today, if you send a gift of \$48, which will provide clean water for ten people, you will get this beautiful devotional from Anne Neilson. And Anne, I just want to say what a delight it is to meet you in person. This book is such a beautiful, beautiful piece of--it's a piece of music. It's just beautiful!

ANNE: Wow! That got me because "doing the hands and feet of Christ," and that's why I do this. Because the Lord said, "I want you to paint and give back." So over this journey of 19 years, it's been painting and then giving back. And so wow, that stuff gets me.

SHEILA: That's awesome! I just want to thank you all for being with us. And we'll see you next time on *LIFE Today*.

[music]

SHEILA: This is the last week for Water for Life. If you haven't called yet, will you please call? If you have, will you call again? Let's do this. Let's bring clean water in Jesus' name.