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Week 13: Mission: Rescue Life

Janie Burkett

James: Thank all of you! Appreciate it! We welcome you to *LIFE Today*. I'm James Robison; Betty and I are thrilled to have an opportunity to spend a few moments with you. I think you're going to be very glad. We're going to be showing you some people later that are held captive against their will as prisoners in the sex industry, which is a \$32 billion industry; trafficking, selling the bodies of children, girls, and sometimes boys, to predators and using them until they are destroyed.

Sometimes, however, a person becomes a prisoner because of the practices, not because someone has captured them but because the powers of deception and darkness and defeat have taken advantage. And sometimes it comes because someone's been hurt. And sometimes, Betty, they've been hurt by something that happens in a religious setting.

I've got to be quite frank, sometimes church folks can be very unchristlike and very unkind; and it is typical that they'll often do it in the name of God -- to take care of God, and yet, they're very much unlike God. This was something that happened to a pastor's daughter, that she saw some things that disappointed her. Ultimately, it led her to a terrible life of shame and guilt and addiction until her life was nearly destroyed. She's told her story in a book that is titled, *A Road to Freedom: Unshackled*. Her name is Janie Burkett.

Would you welcome Janie to *LIFE Today*? Janie, we're glad to see you.

Janie: Nice to be here!

James: Well, you're supposed to be locked up in prison for what would amount to a lifetime.

Janie: Yes, I am.

James: It is a miracle that you're not -- it's a complete miracle! I want to go back and you tell us because I referenced the fact that sometimes church people will respond in a way to certain things that is not exactly best or meaningful, and that actually happened to you.

Tell us what actually set you on your heels, so to speak, and then you started on a journey. I think there may have been some personal things going on in your life. You've indicated in your book that you had a real addiction to food and were overweight. All those things were really a problem area to you but then everything just piled in. Tell us about it.

Janie: Well, we were -- my dad and my mother and I, we were all pastors in Valliant, Oklahoma. We had church there and it was a great church. Then things began to happen and we just really got hurt in that church which really caused me to have a lot of self... issues with maybe the way church is or the way that people are. I always had a problem eating and was insecure with myself and things like that.

So really the hurt that happened to me as a child inside the church really set me on a path. We basically resigned the church when I was about 10 years old and went on the evangelistic field and we traveled around. So we had -- it was my mom and dad and my two sisters and I so we lived in a 28-foot motor home for like two and a half years. Then the Lord gave us a bigger one and we had 35 feet. So it was much challenging.

So instead of really not knowing how to accept the fact that we had left the church and we had left our home and the stability and school and all that, I just began to eat to fill that void inside of me. And then I began like 200 pounds at 16 -- I was 200 pounds at 16.

James: How did you respond to that? What happened?

Janie: I started bulimia; eating disorder called bulimia.

James: Because you didn't like yourself?

Janie: I hated myself. I hated myself. I hated what God had made. So then the Lord finally told -- after we traveled for five and a half years on the evangelistic field and going from church to church and meeting different people; and while we were on the field I was raped at 16. And so I really had more of a self-image problem after that. Then the bulimia became more...

Betty: Did you get to a point where you finally just blamed God for all the things that were happening to you?

Janie: Of course! It was all God's fault. God is the one who did this to me. God is the one who chose this life for me. But God wanted to give us good, and God was giving us good with the revivals and everything. We were seeing people saved, set free all over, but yet I had such a problem within me, hating me.

Then after the rape it just become more prone as you would say. Then we settled down in Henderson, Texas and we started a church -- to build a church there. I really just did not know where to go, how to turn. I didn't know how to start a new life because...

James: How old were you at the time when y'all got to Henderson?

Janie: I was 16. It was right after I was raped. I really just fell into the drug life. I wanted someone to love me and accept me, and to accept me for all of my baggage.

James: Were your parents aware of what was happening to you? Could they see this or was it more hidden at the time when you started?

Janie: They saw it and they tried to help me. My mom and my dad, they're wonderful people and they really tried to pump God into me but you know God has been shoved down my throat all of my life, as you would say. But I think at a point you have to

accept God for yourself. You have to know Jesus yourself -- not just because your parents know Jesus.

James: I know for a fact because I've read it in the book, you really, really got in trouble. You took the drug situation another step. Tell everyone what happened.

Janie: Well, by the time I was 22 years old I was charged with 17 different warrants out for my arrest from organized crime to manufactured delivery, possession of a controlled substance. I was an I.V. user for about five years. I started cocaine when I was 17 and it just began from cocaine to meth to heroin, I.V. using and then eventually it was selling drugs and then trying the habit.

James: Doing this out of Henderson?

Janie: The Tyler area, Henderson. It was mostly in Tyler and Dallas in the east Texas area and north Texas. I really fell into a hard life. I fell into the drug cartel, running dope and selling dope. You would never think it was the nice oh, sweet Janie growing up and loving Jesus. I turned into someone who hated God -- hated God, hated myself. Hated God, hated other people and did not want nothing to do with Christians whatsoever; nothing to do with God because God had let me down so many times.

Now, God is so real to me but back then he was such the enemy; Satan had just tore my mind up saying that he was the enemy.

James: Your response to other people's incorrect action was to do more even more incorrect to greater extremes than even those who disappointed you, trying to find some way to escape and you were actually creating a prison, which in your case actually led you to prison. Now you had a series of situations related to prison, that ultimately ended up in a miracle. Tell us that journey through the prison life.

Janie: Well, after the 17 charges and everything and I was booked in on five; \$1.5 million bond was my bond my first time down. Well, eventually it led me to prison, and all the charges got dropped down to two. And on the first degree felony I was given a 10-year adjudicated probation carrying 30-year prison sentence and on the

second degree felony I got a five-year prison sentence in the women's prison facility. And I spent seven months in the prison for the mentally insane in west Texas called the Skyview Unit. After that I said, "Lord, if you release me, I'll serve you. If you do this for me, I'll do this for you." And when God and I made a deal in jail.

James: You thought you did.

Janie: Yeah, I thought. But he did, he released me from prison and I was paroled out on December 31st, 2007. But I did not know how to stay clean and sober and live a life in society as a good citizen of the world or however you would say it. So six weeks later I fell back into my addictions; drinking again and drugging again.

But see, I had to take a drug test every single week so I couldn't do the drugs like I did before so I just became a full-blown alcoholic drinking a bottle of Jack Daniel's whiskey a day -- a fifth of whiskey a day. And all I could keep down was baby food and applesauce because I was about 86 pounds. And I had no -- my body had completely shut down. I had been tube-fed I don't know how many times, two or three times, in and out of the hospital from the bulimia and the anorexia, it just really went on a downward spiral.

My parents kept telling me about a place called Teen Challenge. Now did I want to go there? No. Okay. So I kind of bickered with God for a little while and then I said, "Okay, God, I'll go." So I was on my way to Teen Challenge or thinking I was on my way to Teen Challenge because the judge had signed off for me to go to Teen Challenge. My parole had been transferred because I was on parole and probation.

Well, I wanted to go do one more rendezvous before I went to go get clean and sober and when I came back I had to see my probation officer and I failed my drug test. And on December the 2nd, 2008 I was arrested and put back in jail. And on December the 18th, I stood in front of the judge. We thought she was going to court order me to the Teen Challenge program. Instead she gave me a 40-year prison sentence for breaking my probation -- 40 years. That's a lifetime because of my choices -- because of me saying "no" to the will of God. That's all it's about. So that's what it took to break me. I was so stubborn in my will. It took that 40-year sentence to say, "Janie, wake up. I have

a plan for you and you've got to get it." This is what the Lord -- he used this to wake me up tremendously.

And so I went back to jail and fell out and didn't know what I was going to do because at this time I was like 90 pounds -- like I said, 90 pounds, I had no life before me whatsoever. I'm locked up for 40 years in this prison. My body was completely shutting down. I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep -- nothing.

A couple of weeks later this woman had been coming to the jail ministry and she had been ministering -- I believe in jail ministry -- this is why I do what I do. And she came to me with a word, a rhema word from God. And she said, "Janie, I came to tell you, after your sentence but you wouldn't hear me but I came back to tell you what God told me." She said, "God told me the day you were sentenced to tell her, 'For it's not over for God until I say it's over for I have the final word in her life.'"

Man! Talk about a seed of hope in my life. And I began to turn around at that point. God says, "Janie, I have a plan for you. There is still hope for you." So I was transferred back to the women's state prison to serve out my 40-year prison sentence.

And this is where I said, "Okay, God, I give it up." I said, "Lord, if it be your will then would you please overturn this sentence and send me to the Teen Challenge program so I can become the woman that you've called me to be? But if not, then give me the grace to accept the fact that I will spend most of my life in this prison and give me peace and love to do it. But I accept you right now."

And so at that time back at home, my parents had been going to 17 different attorneys to find out if my sentence could be overturned. Not one attorney would take my case. Everyone said, "It is impossible. It cannot be done. No one will overturn it. The judge has been on the bench for 25 years. She's not going anywhere. It's impossible."

One of the highest power attorney in our area said that he ain't seen a sentence overturned like this in 55 years in the state of Texas.

James: You're getting all kinds of hope.

Janie: I'm telling you! God is in the miracle-working business! So I tell you --

[Applause]

And so my previous attorney that had my case, he contacted my dad for some reason to talk. He said, "You know, Leland, I have not been able to eat or sleep or anything since Janie got sentenced. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to take up this case again for free. I'm going to petition the new judge for a new trial."

Well, come to find out the judge who sentenced me, she resigned the bench and a new judge was brought into office.

[Laughter]

Yeah! And that new judge heard my case. It wasn't until I said, "God, I will serve you. In or out of prison I will serve you. I give my life to you."

God heard my cry and said, "Okay, now I see your heart and I know your worth something -- you were worth something before, you are worth something now, but you're better now because now you can go out and you can touch other people's lives with your story." That's why God set me free from prison.

And I came back to that -- I came back in front, in Smith county, and I stood in front of the new judge; 84 pounds again, completely broken, but this time my heart was changed. And I asked that judge, we asked her that she would overturn my sentence and send me to the Teen Challenge program so that I could go through the program and be who I need to be. But if not, then send me to a medical facility in prison so that I will not die while I'm locked up.

So she made her decision. And when she came out she said, "Miss Burkett, this was a very hard case." She said, "However, if I could give you 60 years and probate it, I would because what you have done is unacceptable with this court."

I was a drug dealer. I ruined people's lives. But I see now that God's given me a voice to speak into people's lives.

So she said, "So what I'm going to do is..." She said, "But that would not be merciful nor will it be compassionate to give you that sentence. What I'm going to do is I'm going to confine you to the women's state prison for 10 years with a \$10,000 fine."

And I just went, "Whoo! Okay! It's better than 40!"

She said, "However, I'm going to probate that sentence that you go to the Teen Challenge program, you complete the program and you make something of yourself, Miss Burkett."

[Applause]

James: And you did! You went.

Janie: I did!

James: And God changed your life. As he has so many at Teen Challenge -- so many I know and love. I praise God for what the Lord led David Wilkerson to go to New York City to birth. He didn't have an idea where it would end up. The movie, The Cross and the Switchblade, which Pat Boone was in, many others that you know, what a tremendous story!

Okay, your life was totally changed then. How many years ago was that that you went to that Teen Challenge? How many has it been?

Janie: Four years. March 2nd it will be four years that I graduated. They had to feed me one ounce at a time for four to six months until I learned how to eat again, live again, and gain weight. It was very hard but I made it. So now my vision is to have a home for women like myself called Janie's House of Hope.

James: And you have it already started and everything's being built and getting ready and it's in Henderson. What do you call it?

Janie: It's called Janie's House of Hope.

James: Now do you have a web site so people could find out about it if they wanted to support it? If they wanted perhaps to say, "When you're ready, we might have someone you could help take care of." What's the web site?

Janie: It's www.Janie'sHouseOfHope.com. Or you could go to my personal web site because I do a lot of speaking and traveling.

James: If they wanted you to come speak, would they go to your web site?

Janie: Sure! They could go to my web site, JanieBurkett.com. All my information is on there.

James: And if you wanted the book, you could get that online there too.

Do you praise God for what he did in Janie's life? And what he's going to do with her life now? Isn't it amazing? There is nothing impossible for God.

Listen, there are some of you sitting here that say, "Well, I've got issues too. I've got just some of those issues."

Some of you may say, "James, I think I've dug an even deeper pit."

Beth Moore, who teaches here week after week, she says she dug a pit. She dug her own pit but God was able to lift her up.

If you want someone to pray with you, someone to care, someone to share, you call that number right there, it's a prayer line and say, "Would you pray with me? I need

help. I want to give my life to God like Janie did." And you'll find that he gives all of himself to you because he gave his son for you.

Janie, we reach out all over the world and touch people with God's love. We're doing something right now I know you can identify with because you've seen people trapped. We are seeking to rescue, literally rescue and restore people who have been sold into slavery in the sexual predatory area and realm.

I want you to watch this closely. Please! Not just with your eyes but with your heart. And I'm going to show you how you can be a part of a miracle.

On the mission field

>> These are the ones that are preyed upon -- innocent kids just playing around in their neighborhood. These are some of the kids that are actually in danger.

>> Every child is at risk but little girls are especially at risk. They're taken and they're trafficked into the red light district.

Announcer: This evil known as human trafficking destroys the lives of thousands of innocent children little by little, through unspeakable acts of sexual violence for the sole purpose of making money.

>> This man has now been asking Lachme's mother for her. He wants her to start to sell herself to men so that he can be making money.

Announcer: This is the reality of human trafficking. It is people living in the shadows, depraved people trading in human flesh who for the love of money are taking captive young girls and using them like caged animals until their bodies can no longer perform the sordid acts demanded of them.

>> Can you imagine to be taken as a nine-year-old little girl, spending your entire life in the brothel and then thrown out like an animal because you can no longer sell your body as a sex slave?

Announcer: These children, these girls are crying for someone to help them find a way out before they too are left for dead.

End of clip

In the studio

James: What people do for the love of money! To take children -- that woman that Giselle was talking about --

By the way she was trafficked and she works with us now. You know what we do with those women when we get them set free -- when we rescue them? We teach them a trade so they can make a living, which is how many of them were taken into slavery because their parents were told they were being taken to teach them a skill so they could make a living and help their impoverished family.

And now Betty, we can get them out of that situation and put them in a place. We're seeking in Cambodia to build a safe house. We desperately need it. It really is a house of hope and a house of destiny, which is what we call the home in Thailand, which is an unbelievable place. Well, we need to start a safe house there and it's going to cost \$345,000 -- it would be about \$2 million here in the states -- but over there because of the labor and because of the less expensive building, we can do that, but we need your help to do it.

And Betty, it takes \$128 average to rescue someone like that woman that Giselle was talking about. Everybody can do that or at least give part of it. We've got some friends that will match what people give.

In other words, if you had say, \$64 now, it would then be matched and then we'd have \$128. So there's a level at which everyone can step in and help us.

Betty: James, and that's not very much -- that cost is not very much when you think about what you're doing. You're reaching out and you're giving hope to the hopeless. These precious children don't know when they're taken what's ahead of them. They don't know the imprisonment that they're put into, the abuse and all the horrible

things they go through. They're treated worse than animals and we can make that difference. We can give them a place to lay their little heads. We can give them a place they can go to be children as they should be able to be. So please join with us and let's reach out to these precious little ones.

James: You know they had an academy award winning film several years ago called *Slum Dog Millionaire* and it showed how they were taking children, right where we work in India and you saw one of our missionaries there in India, where children were left near the railroad and parents just leave them. And then predators would come and get them and they would take them into sexual slavery but they will also take them and pluck out one of their eyes or cut off one of their hands so they would make beggars out of them and they would be more effective as beggars if they didn't have a hand or they didn't have an eye.

Now that's how evil the love of money can make people. Money is not evil, it does good things. I'm asking you to help people with money. But the love of money causes people to do those things and then being a slave, sold in sexual bondage, those people are there totally against their will. They're not there trying to make a living, they're being used.

And the love of God through missionaries and relief workers, we can set them free but they need our support. The missionaries have planted their lives in the midst of that pain and suffering. Now they ask us, "Keep us here. Give us the wherewithal to put loving arms around them."

Would you dial that number? I'm so glad missionaries can communicate with us at *LIFE* because they know our viewers want to share the life and love of God. Would you dial that number? Take your bankcard, use it like a check, please or go online and make your gift LifeToday.org. Your gift to help us rescue those precious children and those women will be doubled, matched by some caring friends that believe in what we're doing.

Then we need you to help us build that safe house. If you could possibly make a gift of \$1,000 or more, please, that's going to cost \$345,000 alone.

We have some special gifts for you to say thank you. But I think when you see what your love does, that's all the thanks you need. We give you gifts to bless you in your spiritual journey because we love you and we care about your journey. Thank you so much for making that call. Thank you for your gift.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Human trafficking -- it's impossible to believe but at this very moment innocent children, many very young, are being sold and forced into sexual slavery and exploited in every way imaginable. And someone must save them!

With your help today we can reach, rescue, and restore their hope for a better future. And now a miracle opportunity of a matching grant means your gift of \$128 to help rescue a child will be matched to help rescue two children.

Your \$64 gift will be matched to help rescue one child from the horrors of human trafficking. This year, with your help, we also hope to build a safe house in Cambodia where young rescued girls can find safety, loving care, and direction for a new life. The cost of this safe house is \$345,000.

With your gift, please request *My Daily Gift*, a beautiful new devotional describing the great love of God, who treasures you more than you can imagine.

With your gift of \$128, which today will help rescue two children, you'll receive the side-by-side Bible, which includes the easy-to-read New International Version and the Amplified text with its additional words and insights.

Finally, please prayerfully consider a gift of \$1,000 to help establish the safe house in Cambodia and you may request our 2014 commemorative glass sculpture, "The Blessing."

Please call, write, or make your gift online today!

End of clip

In the studio

James: Thank you so much for your help. I want to encourage you to help us with the safe house. You make that \$1,000 gift we're going to send you the beautiful glass sculpture, "The Blessing."

We're sending My Daily Gift for any gift you make knowing that if you help us rescue those children, those women, your gift is going to be doubled because some caring friends said, "We will match your gift. We want to be a part of this." If you'd like to have Janie's book, *Unshackled*, because you know someone who may need this story, you want the inspiration, you want to know more about what she's doing, maybe be a part of it, there's her web site. But we'd be happy to send you the book to say thank you for helping us help others.

Join Betty and me in saying thanks to Janie again for being our guest.

Janie, God bless you! Open doors for you and provide, is my prayer. You want to help Janie? You may need to get somebody over there to Henderson? Get in touch with her. Thanks so much for watching.