

3/30/15

Week 14 Mission: Rescue Life
Renee Napier and Eric Smallridge

Betty: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! Thank you so much for joining us; I'm Betty and this is James.

James: We're giving away, at the end of the program, praise music, *Songs of Freedom* because God just really... Jesus came to set captives free, and we really want you to know that that's why he is here.

One of the things that holds people captive is an imprisonment to unforgiveness and bitterness and resentment and hate. It's been said by a great man, and I'm not going to quote it exactly right, I don't even remember who it was but it was someone on the level of C.S. Lewis; that when you take out vengeance on someone or unforgiveness you're digging two graves, and that really is the truth. Well, we have a miracle story of forgiveness.

Let me tell you something else I want you to remember. They're going to put it on the screen: STREAM.org. That's a web site. It's a gift from God to you for freedom's sake, for the glory of God and the benefit of everyone you love; tributaries of wisdom and love to help correct a nation's perilous course and awaken a church to be the family of God in holy harmony.

Our guests are a miracle story. Renee Napier witnessed, not seeing it, but the effect of her daughter and a friend being killed by a drunk driver. The drunk driver was named Eric Smallridge. The mother of the daughter and her best friend who was killed with her, the mother of one of those girls was moved to do something pretty well you might say indescribable, and Eric drove the car that killed the two girls, including Renee's daughter.

Would you welcome Renee and Eric to *LIFE Today* please? Well, it's one of those things that you never want to even hear about, talk about, certainly don't want to experience it. You lost your daughter and another girl; what happened?

Renee: Well, my whole world crumbled. I just fell apart. I did not ever want to know what it felt like, like you said, to lose a child because I had four and she was one of my identical twins. At that moment when I got the news, I didn't know how I was going to breathe another breath.

James: Did you go to the scene of the accident by any chance? Or just go to the hospital and find out that it was over? What happened?

Renee: My sister-in-law showed up at the door, it was a Saturday morning, it was about 8: 45; and she showed up at the door to give me that news. She just said, "There's been accident. It was Megan; she didn't make it." And of course, I denied it. That's what you do first. I screamed out. All those years that I'd been hearing about wailing, I learned what wailing was. It just came out from the depths of my soul.

James: Now it was a drunk driver. Did you find that out pretty quick?

Renee: I did. That was one of the first questions I asked, "Was the driver of the car drunk?" My sister-in-law said that they believed that there was alcohol involved.

James: And your daughter was 20? Was her friend the same age?

Renee: Yes.

James: Were they best friends?

Renee: Best friends.

James: So there's another family torn up. Did you resent... did you find anger and resentment toward the person that did this just welling up inside of you?

Renee: At that moment, no because I was too just struck with the grief, and trying to figure out how... you want to go back in time and you want to redo that. You want to... I was saying why didn't I make her come home last night and spend the night with me? She's 20 years old. I did ask her if she wanted to come and stay but she was going to stay with her friend. Why didn't I make her do that? So you start playing the "what if" game. If I'd just done this she would still be alive, and if I could just go back in time.

James: And you play that over and over.

Renee: We do it with any situation like that, even if it is an illness, could we have done something different? The trials come, you found out what's going on, found out Eric, who is sitting here by you now was the driver. How long did it take you to realize, Eric, you're driving, you shouldn't have been driving in the condition you were in. What did you do? Run a light? What did you do?

Eric: I was actually just driving down the road. It was a three lane road that merged into two. The car next to me went to merge over. Alcohol affects your depth perception; whether he was really close to me or not, I thought he was. So I tried to swerve away to avoid him, and in doing so I clipped the car next to me.

They say that pride comes before destruction. It was that pride in me that night that thought I can do this. I can make it home one more time. I've only had a couple of drinks. I can do it again, and I'll be okay. That pride, that fleshly confidence, that false sense of security allowed me to get behind the wheel of that car. And in doing so, I became responsible for taking Renee's daughter and the life of Lisa Dixon.

James: Were you hurt at all yourself that night?

Eric: I wasn't really hurt. My car, my truck rolled a couple of times, but I actually walked away from it.

James: How long before you knew what had happened to the girls?

Eric: It actually was a few hours because I was knocked unconscious briefly so that's the only injury that I really had. So they took me aside and they put me in a police car. At that moment, I thought that I'd been caught for drinking and driving. I had no idea what the severity of the accident really was.

I knew there was an accident. I started to formulate my thought process. Oh, this car came into my lane. Let's try to blame shift. So I wanted to blame it all on him because whatever was coming my way I didn't want to be responsible for.

But at that point I had no idea what was coming. So they took me to the ambulance. They asked me if I needed help, if I needed any assistance. I said I did not.

They said, "We're going to take your blood."

I said, "Why would you need a blood sample from me?"

And they said, "Because this is an extremely bad accident."

I said, "Well, I have insurance. What's really going on?"

They said, "That's what we're trying to find out from you."

I said, "Well, this car came into my lane and I just tried to avoid it. And the next thing you know my vehicle is rolling down the street and here we are."

They said, "We don't see any evidence of another car at this moment. We just think you're trying to make something up so you're not responsible for this."

I looked at him and I said, "Well, responsible for what? I said I had insurance."

They said, "No. For the two girls those are dead in the car over there."

That's how I found out about it. So my heart just sunk.

James: So you actually, you found out the circumstances; you find out this. He does go through a trial and he is convicted and sent to a lengthy prison sentence. When does the situation or feelings toward him, when you know what actually happened, tell me what begins to go on in your life? Because there's every room to have tremendous resentment for the boy, young man, that killed your daughter and her friend.

Renee: Well, I have to just back up just a little bit and just briefly tell you that three years prior to Megan's death, I got divorced and I didn't want it. I experienced bitterness and hatred and anger. I realized what that does to you.

James: -- Toward your spouse?

Renee: -- Towards my spouse. On the day that Megan died I had a moment alone with him and I was able to tell him that I forgive him -- that I forgave him. And it was huge because --

James: You're saying that to your former...

Renee: I said it to my ex-husband.

James: Why did you say it that day? What was going on?

Renee: I just felt like this -- it was like it's time to draw that line in the sand. This has got to be -- enough is enough.

James: In other words, the resentment was killing you. You could feel that?

Renee: I could feel it. A friend of mine had pointed it out to me but I just knew that I had to tell him face to face. We had that moment in the car. It was like God just lifted that burden off of me immediately.

James: So you actually experienced a miracle of releasing that resentment and hate. Did that then carry over to the person that killed your daughter?

Renee: Absolutely.

James: So how did you express it to him?

Renee: I decided because I'd felt the hatred that I was never going to hate anyone again, so I fought that. I would not allow myself to hate him. But you need to know something else that I noticed when the police came to my home about three days after the crash with the accident report; I noticed... they had told me that he was 27, my sister-in-law told me he was 27 on the day of the crash, and I noticed his birthday, and I realized he was my son's age, they were the exact same age. So my immediate thought was, that could have been my son. I'd be pretty arrogant as a mom if I didn't realize that my son could make a choice; it's all about the choices that we make. And so that kind of made me look at him as a human.

So I'm glad that I kept that in sight because he is a human being, made a bad choice, and going down the road. When he pled not guilty, I really then experienced rage and anger and not really -- just at the situation and I couldn't understand why he would do that because it was so obvious that he's the one that caused that. So I definitely had it.

James: But he goes to prison now. You're in prison; how are you feeling now? You have a long sentence.

Eric: I felt like I deserved what I got. And the only reason why I pled not guilty, at this time in my life I was wandering kind of aimlessly. I had really good upbringing, my dad was military, my mom was in school administration, had two older brothers; I had every opportunity there was to succeed but there was one thing that was really lacking in my life and that was Jesus Christ. I had not accepted him. I believed in God, but I was just talking the talk, I wasn't walking the walk. Nothing that I was doing was pleasing to God so I was without that. So I was trying to bear this burden on my own.

So when the lawyers told me, "You've got to blame it on this other car. You can't say you're sorry or else you're accepting guilt and then you might as well just plead guilty. You're going to prison for 30 years."

I was a scared little man that was a shell of a person and I just took their advice and I pled not guilty because I couldn't handle it. I didn't want to be responsible. I didn't want to be responsible for taking Megan and Lisa, I didn't want to be responsible for letting my parents down, I didn't want to be the one that extinguished my own hopes and dreams, and so I was in a really, really dark place.

James: Okay, but you end up getting convicted and going to prison. Where do you guys come back together? Where does she come back into your life somehow?

Renee: Well, let me interject this. At his sentencing, I had been praying all up to the time. We have that moment where we can do a victim impact statement. So at his sentencing on October 3rd of 2003 I was able to look at him in his eyes and say to him, "I forgive you." That was huge for me -- that was huge for me.

James: Had to be a miracle! What did it do to you when you heard it?

Eric: For me, I had -- I think everybody's heard of chain gang religion or jailhouse religion, well, at that point in my life I think you can obviously understand that I was in need of a savior. I became kind of suicidal. But somebody told me, "You're not beyond God's reach." While I didn't feel like forgiving myself, I didn't have any scripture to stand on. So they started showing me this. They started showing me that hey, you're not beyond his reach.

James: Somebody in prison showed you?

Eric: That's right. So I accepted that. And that this point in my life I accepted Christ and he gave me the strength to deal with what was to come. I had no idea what accepting Christ was about to do with my life. The old saying is, "You've got to know when to hold them and know when to fold them." At that point, I was ready to fold the hand of life and just... I was ready to be done with it, ready to take my own life. But

instead, I handed that five cards, (we were playing five card draw in my analogy,) I handed it God and what he did with it, was he turned it into an aces. The irony of that is there is only four aces in a deck but I had five in my hand. So he turned everything around.

James: And she came and let you know what was going on with her. And then amazingly, you began to try to get his sentence reduced or forgiven out of the forgiveness in your heart so that the two of you could do what?

Renee: So that we could go speak together and hopefully, do DUI presentations and share the story of forgiveness.

Eric: I was so new to the faith that when she said, "I forgive you," to me, I would have been more ready for a slap in the face because my flesh in me still understood that hatred. When she said, "I forgive you," I was blown away. And it was like a modern day miracle for me. It was the Word coming to life where it says to forgive those who have trespassed against you. It wasn't just something you say in church.

Then I started to realize the strength of it and what the belief in Christ is. Somewhere I read it says, "A belief is only as strong as the actions it produces" and that was coming to life. And I saw her whole family, it wasn't just Renee but her entire family came and professed their forgiveness for me. So it was the most unbelievable thing. Modern day miracle!

And then they started talking about a reduction of sentence. Now mind you, I had appealed three times. Man said "no" every single time. I got denied on the Florida supreme level, then in the United States Supreme Court, they even denied it. There was one motion that was left and that's where there are no statutes to be quoted but in that day there was some scriptures quoted. So the judge, on the bench let everybody in that courtroom know who was really in charge that day.

James: Wow! And they released you with her to go and speak on the dangers of driving under the influence.

Eric: Yes, they did.

Renee: And he was still incarcerated at that time. We started in 2010 so his sentence was up in 2012 after the reduction.

James: But he got out in '10?

Renee: No, he got out in '12, but he got out as an inmate in the custody of the local sheriffs to go with me to speak at schools. So he was handcuffed, chained, shackled.

James: Now he's not having any of that on now. So shackles are broken.

Eric: They were broken.

James: Is the group there that gave you the pardon, are they happy about it? Does the state seem to be happy about it? Are people rejoicing at this miracle? Because it is amazing!

Eric: Absolutely. The Department of Corrections in the state of Florida is actually riddled with Christians. We didn't know it but God is at work at all levels.

James: I would like to get some churches riddled with Christians.

[Laughter]

I just like to see you pray so you can get out and go to church and try to get them set free. That's, by the way, that's what we're giving away -- to some degree -- and we're trying to set girls that are trafficked free. Is this a great story of a great God?

[Applause]

So do you all have a web site that if people wanted you to come speak they could find you?

Renee: D.U.I. Promise.com. And then we're on Facebook too.

James: And you all would go travel to speak even out of state and so forth? Or is this just Florida that needs help? Texas has some issues, too, you know.

Renee: We'll come to Texas.

Eric: God has blessed us with the ability, we've talked to a couple of professional football teams, we've been given the opportunity to go up to New York. We've been to South Dakota. He's taken us around. But what our hope and our passion is is to spread the love of Christ and to show the world how much forgiveness can impact the world.

James: Well, you can do it effectively. You can do it effectively and you can hear that. There's the web site. Get them to come to your area.

Here's the thing I want to say to both of you, you need to understand multiplying. You could both be effective, each of you. In other words, you wouldn't always have to be together; like you could go on your own, you could go on your own so that you wouldn't always have to be matching schedules. All I'm saying to you is, there is so much truth in each one of you that you need to understand that. That you can be trusted with the story because God is writing the story with your lives right now, your countenance right now, the way you look, your beautiful smile, the peace, and the confidence and the way you speak and project, Eric, it's a real gift from God.

Don't you agree that God is just going to use them? I really hope and I pray -- I pray that all of you who are sitting here see the importance of forgiveness, not digging two graves, two prisons, and also the fact that you can express the grace of God when you experience it.

Father, I pray for everyone watching, wherever they are right now, they would forgive and they would ask you to forgive and they would experience your grace, just in a moment of trust; in Jesus' name.

Do you see the telephone number there? You want someone to pray with you? You say, "I want to know God as my Father, I want a new life"; be forgiven, be a forgiver? Just call and say, "That's what I want."

I'll send you a book that I wrote called *Knowing God as Father*, and it's also a simple Bible study.

We're doing our best, both of you know, I've referenced it to set free victims in sexual trafficking that have been preyed upon and taken, many of them as little girls. I want you to watch, please, please -- and what if you could do what you just heard? Totally set someone free? And you would be the one that had the keys because you do. Watch.

On the mission field:

Announcer: If brokenness had a face it would be Dalene's -- her spirit, her will, her body. All at the cruel hand of sex trafficking.

Dalene: After my mother died, a lady came and told me she would raise me like her daughter. But instead, she sold me to a brothel to pay off her debts. I have scars from the chains they put on me. They force me to service eight to ten men each night, and we are not allowed to eat or drink unless we do. If girls are disobedient, they're sent away by boat and they never come back. I haven't felt love since my mother died. I want freedom. I want to not live in hell anymore. This life, it is like hell to me.

End of clip

In the studio:

Betty: James, as I watched that, my first impression is I want to go and wrap my arms around that precious girl and wipe her tears and say "It's going to be okay. Someone is coming to help you. You're going to get the help that you so want. You're going to get that freedom that you ask for."

We can do that through our sharing of our love and our hope for them that we give them, that God has put in us if we'll just all join together and make a place, a safe place for these precious children to go away from all the abuse and the prison and all the lies

and everything that they're told so that they can imprison them and make them do what they want them to do and destroy their precious lives. I hope you will join with us.

James: She said it's just like hell and it is because she is a prisoner. This is not something she chose to do. She hasn't felt loved but she is about to because you're going to love her. Like Betty said, I want to love her.

And the thing is that our mission workers, these are the most beautiful people who will go in there in that pain and put their arms around, with our help, can actually reach them and rescue them and then we are able to restore them. There's so much that we're not able to show you. A lot of times we can't show you the mission or relief workers' faces because then they become a target. When that gets out and our programs online worldwide, not just on networks but you can watch *LIFE Today* any time by going to LifeToday.org and click up today's program or any other program on there if you missed one. So if you see these people, then it can endanger them.

So many of the programs that we shoot and I don't know because I didn't see someone else there but there could have been a hidden camera and she's just telling her story to somebody listening. Much of the footage we do have we have to do it that way. It's a dangerous thing yet people plant their life there.

So here's the thing, you hold the keys to her prison. And if we give the workers the resources not only to maintain the centers that you've built, we're completing some more now because you've helped us in the past to be able to do that. But right now we've got thousands -- thousands that we see that we can get if we can raise the funds, and the average is \$128. So if you could give \$128 we'd be able to send the resources. That's what we're waiting to do; we're just like releasing a river of love but we have to have the resources, you provide them. Betty and I do our part, don't ever wonder, not only by going all over the world, but by ourselves giving; but we can't do it all, we have to do it together.

So if you will dial that number or if you'll go to LifeToday.org, just go there, that's the easiest way, take your bankcard or dial the number and make the gift God puts on

your heart. If you could give \$1280, as an example, that's ten rescued; would you do that? -- The \$128?

But you may say, "I can't do that." \$64 doubled we've got it; \$32 and three others join you, we've got it. Do not excuse yourself and say, "I don't have enough." You've got the key so please right now make the gift God puts on your heart.

We've got some things we want to send you to bless you. We've got the songs and praise of freedom, we've got a book that helps us preserve freedom, and a beautiful painting by Thomas Kinkade that will be sent to you framed. We want to say thank you, but you're setting these precious girls and children, sometimes their children that are now about to be trafficked. Would you please make that call? Please do it! Or go online and make the gift God put on your heart. You're giving life -- you're giving freedom. Thank you so much for doing it!

Begin video clip

Announcer: Innocent children created to be happy, loved, and cared for are being abducted and sold at the hands of violent predators, their spirit and bodies broken under horrific emotional and physical abuse. Through *Mission: Rescue Life* you can reach out to save children vulnerable to sex traffickers. You can help rescue those already enslaved and you can restore their lives with hope for a future.

Your gift today of only \$128 will help rescue a child and change their destiny forever. With gifts of \$64 or \$32, we will combine your support with others to help rescue one more child from the shame and pain of sexual slavery.

With your gift of any amount we will send you the *Songs of Freedom* CD, a collection of ten uplifting worship songs that are sure to become a favorite for your quiet time, drive time, or personal worship.

In addition to the CD, you'll receive *Indivisible*, a powerful soul-stirring book by James Robison and Jay Richards.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280 to help rescue ten children and you may request this beautifully framed canvas print of the "Forest Chapel" by the Painter of Light™, Thomas Kinkade.

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

End of clip

In the studio

James: Well, Betty and I just say thank you. Please, if you ever get a busy because people are calling in to trust Christ, and want someone to pray with them, or many are calling to help, you just be determined and you go online or call until you get through. Setting people free, and we're going to send you the *7 Songs of Freedom*, Indivisible. We're in the process of losing our freedom in this great country of ours and most of the world's praying for us because if freedom falls here, it's like it will topple everywhere. Most people know that in other countries.

I want to say thanks for the freedom that Renee and Eric have shared with us, freedom to forgive, the freedom that comes from being forgiven. Would you express your thanks to Eric and to Renee?

You've been such a blessing!

There is their web site again. Do you see it? You get them to come. And let me show you again: STREAM.org. Make that your daily news source and inspiration, and how to get this nation out of darkness. Thank you so much for watching.

Announcer: Be sure to visit stream.org, a rich and lively source for breaking news, analysis, and entertainment! Stream.org