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Week 14: Mission: Rescue Life

James and Betty Robison

Esther Fleece

James: Oh boy! I tell you what. It's just a privilege to be able to share this time with you. I'm James Robison. Betty and I welcome you to *LIFE Today*. We have one, let's say, I don't know if student is the right term but one of the associates, one of the close friends with Ravi Zacharias, whom I just respect beyond words.

Ravi, if you're watching, love you! Thank God for you, your family, everything you do; for the incredible Ravi institute that has been started there, your incredible training school.

We have Esther Fleece. Now I want you to look at this title of this book, *No More Faking Fine*. You remember you faked fine for awhile as a church lady? You were the ultimate church lady.

Betty: I was acquainted with that phrase.

James: But inside you just faked a lot of stuff. As a matter of fact, she didn't even know the Lord. She had become a church member and then met Christ, came out of the choir to give her life to Christ.

Well, Esther was doing some faking related to fine. Would you welcome with us Esther to *LIFE Today*? Esther, we're glad you're here

Esther: Thank you. Thank you.

James: You like Ravi, I suppose?

Esther: Absolutely! He is a great teacher. And so are you. It is really an honor to be here with you.

James: You put me at a level with Ravi, I'm good with it. What do you mean by *No More Faking Fine*? Tell me what set up this title and you saying, "I'm through with this." What did that mean?

Esther: I think so many of us say that we're fine when we're asked how we are doing.

Especially in the church I think -- I'm so grateful that you shared a little bit, Betty of how you did that because I find myself at an early age adopted by the Lord and disciplined in wonderful churches and I read all the scripture about how God wanted me to rejoice always and always give thanks and never worry.

But I missed out on all those invitations in scripture to come to him when I'm weary, to give him my burden, that he actually cares to hear me when I'm in distress. There is an invitation to go to him. So this book is really birthed out of a season of lament that I that I found myself in. And I'd never realized that God cared about my laments just as much as he cares about my accolades and achievements for him as well.

James: All right, but you had some issues in the family. Something led to this faking time. What was it?

Esther: I was abandoned by both of my biological parents. My father had a mental illness and he left the family around nine, ten years old. I was in the courts a lot testifying as a character witness on several trials and he was losing the business; just very traumatic early childhood years.

My mother ended up remarrying and that father shortly left after having an affair. And then my mother left me. So by the time I was 13, 14, 15, I really found myself alone and having to just make it on my own. I was never legally adopted. I just lived with different families in the community and in the church. And because I didn't have parents that listened to my bad day at school, I didn't know that God cared about my bad days too.

James: What happened? You refer to it in the book where you actually were having to read from your diary as a little girl where you obviously recounted some things related to what was going on and you were pretty tearful. What were the words you heard?

Esther: Sure. I was ten years old. I was testifying in a felony case. My biological parents were on opposite sides of the aisle. And of course, I was alone before having to testify because they didn't want me to be influenced. I walked down the aisle of the courtroom alone, sat up in the witness stand. I remember as a child I wanted to appear strong. I remember thinking, don't cry. Don't let anyone see that you're upset.

I sat up there and my father's lawyer began taking my diary out of a plastic bag. It was used as evidence, exhibit B; I still remember. I was asked to start reading my diary. I broke down. I was just so embarrassed, so ashamed. In a moment I really needed comfort, I really needed a defender myself the judge looked at me and said, "You need to suck it up. You need to answer the questions and you need to suck it up."

So the ten-year-old girl, hearing that from a person in authority, I thought that's what I was supposed to do with my pain. I thought I was supposed to suck it up and not let people see me cry. And I lived really for the next 20 years and really misunderstood God as a judge. When I heard God as judge in scripture I thought, well, he wants me to suck it up too. But God is a just judge but not like the earthly judge I experienced. He doesn't tell us to suck it up.

James: Those words of "suck it up" caused you to start faking fine. That probably launched that journey didn't it?

Esther: It sure did for a good 20 years.

Betty: I think a lot of people live in that situation; don't you? Especially Christians a lot of times, we think, well, everything is supposed to be fine on the outside and you're supposed to appear to have it altogether and not have any problems; which "you're a Christian aren't you?"

A lot of times we put those expectations on ourselves. I know I did thinking I should be able to cope with anything that comes at me. I should present myself as having it altogether and it's not that way

Esther: And I don't know where it happened in the church. We are supposed to comfortable with boasting in our weaknesses. Christians should need God and I don't know where we have gone away with that language of lament. The Jewish people were great at lamenting and they lamented in community. So I'm hoping this discussion brings back this language of lament that we see all throughout scripture.

And that Christians should be the first ones to say there is something wrong. There is pain in this life. Yet, there is a God who not only listens to us in our distress but bottles our tears when we cry.

James: Wow! Now when you decided that I'm not going to fake it, what led you to stop faking it and then move over into reality and really trust in him?

Esther: Well, unfortunately it wasn't just my deep spiritual walk. It was actually more unfortunate circumstances. I was able by God's grace to study at wonderful places under wonderful people. I've worked for great Christian ministries and even the church. I knew how to be an employee for God.

I wasn't a very good daughter though. I didn't know how to sit and rest. And God allowed my biological father, 19 years later to re-enter my life and he began stalking me. I didn't understand

why God was letting it happen. I felt like I have checked suffering off my list. I have forgiven him on a number of occasions. I've moved on. I've made this new life for myself. Why is this past revisiting?

So that was when I really had a crisis in faith and I realized some of my faith was wrong. I was almost holding on to a karma theology; like if I do good for God, then good will happen to me. And I really missed out that suffering is a part of this life, that troubles are going to come to the most faithful people, to people God loves.

So it was during that crisis of faith that I found this language of lament that actually rescued my walk with God.

James: So it's like you got honest. You got totally honest with God. What happened when you did that?

Esther: Well, I remember it like it was yesterday. I was actually seeing a counselor which previously, I thought that was like the last resort. Now I think, only the strong go to counseling; right? It's hard to do.

But I was seeing a counselor and he said, "Esther, I want you to write out your laments to God, your complaints that are heavy on your heart. Tomorrow you're going to come in and present those to me, you're going to share those with me." I said, "There is no way I'm going to complain to God. He is the only one that stuck around for me. I'm not going to be ungrateful."

Sure enough, I couldn't sleep. It was one o'clock in the morning, two o'clock in the morning, three o'clock in the morning and I just started lamenting. I didn't even know what it was at the time. I said, "God, will you ever be merciful to me again? Have I lost your favor? Will you ever be compassionate to me? What did I do that I'm deserving of this affliction?"

And all these laments kept coming out. The number 77 came to my mind. I majored in communication so that I don't have to take math. Like I'm not really -- I don't see numbers. The number 77 came to mind. At that time I'd only been able to read the book of Psalms so that's all I knew to do. I went to the book of Psalms and I read Psalm 77. And every single lament that I cried out to God was in the Psalms.

What happened was that God showed me that he doesn't tell me to suck it up when I lament him. He actually draws near to me when I'm brokenhearted. He actually saved me again when I was crushed in spirit. He gave me a spirit and put a new song in my heart, a hymn of praise to thank him in my darkest time. That's when I realized that my laments are just as precious to him than anything else.

Betty: And that's what he was waiting for -- for you to really reveal the hurt and the pain and the disappointment of *him* even because he already knows anyway.

James: One of the most beautiful pictures that I see in the Psalms is "he inclined his ear." It's really the picture and I've understood from those who understand let's say the graphic pictures in the Hebrew language that there even seems to be an instance where Jesus is on the edge of a pit that you may have been thrown in as Joseph was, you may have fallen in circumstances or you may have dug it with your horrible lifestyle and practices and you find yourself in the mess that you made. And Jesus, I see him and honestly, in my own prayer time just looking at his heart, I see him on his knees inclining his ear. It's like he is saying, "Just ask me."

But I honestly believe that I see him leaning over so far, it is kind of like the father of the prodigal, I don't think he just went outside to look down the road. I don't think he just walked down the road a little way on some days, I think many times he went to the first bend in the road and looked down that bend. He might have even gone to another bend. I think that father was longing for him to come. I see Jesus there on the edge of the pit inclining his ear but I also feel like I see him reaching down and just saying, "Please reach up. I'll lift you up out of the pit. I'll lift you up out the pain. I want to."

And if we could only understand how anxious he is to lighten the load. I think you experienced that. It's like when you got honest, you came clean, so to speak, you were willing to bear your soul and trust the Lord with it, the one you can totally trust. And you immediately experienced the blessing of him lightening the load and brightening the day. It's as though he wiped away your tears right then.

Esther: And he was tender to me. I think so many of us, we have maybe an early childhood memory of somebody that silenced our grief or silenced our pain so we're anticipating that God's going to do that and he doesn't. He does lighten the load.

It says in Psalm 145 that the Lord is good to all. I used to think the Lord was not kind to me because my circumstances weren't kind but it says "The Lord is good to all and he is near to those who draw near to him in honesty." That's what it took. It took me being honest to end the pretend, to take the mask off, to say, "God, this is where I need you. This is where I don't understand why suffering and affliction are still hitting my life. How are you allowing this? Why are you allowing this?"

That's also when I realized that God laments himself. Even before the program you said, "Father, we want to lighten your load."

James: And brighten *his* day

Esther: Yes! Sometimes we're so busy taking our loads to him but we forget too that he laments and that's why we're to lament. We can grieve the Holy Spirit. God laments so we ought to be lamenting too. We long to be restored to him.

James: When you recently, your father died, what was that like to you? What happened?

Esther: Well, you got to meet my wonderful husband here today. It took me probably a good ten years of healing and counseling to even be open to dating and God brought the most wonderful, patient, godly man as my husband. When I was at the height of love, if you will, we were on our honeymoon and just couldn't believe that God would give me the gift of marriage, we found out that my biological father had died. I tell you it's still grief -- it still grieves me. It grieves me for the relationship that I never had with him; that I never will have; grieves me for other children who have broken relationships with their father.

But you know what the miracle was? Is that God gave me somebody to lament with. And not all the listeners out there are going to have a spouse to lament with but I do believe that God has set up his church as a family and that he doesn't want us to lament alone. There will be seasons when we are in -- lonely seasons where we pray alone but God does design and desire for us to lament in community. And God gave me the gift of a husband to lament the loss again, another loss again with my biological family but not alone this time -- with my husband.

James: And too many people are alone. And really, one reason that *LIFE Today* is here is we don't want you to be alone. We want to bear the load. That's why the prayer partners and they're very serious. They take your concerns very seriously.

Throughout the program you've used the word *lament* and I know, of course, it is connected to grief or to sorrow or openness. How do you define it?

Ravi Zacharias teaches us apologetics to be able to give a defense, a declaration, an explanation of why these things matter and why they're important to us. How do you define lament in your mind? What do you want the listener and the one who reads, what do you want them to hear in that?

Esther: Lament is a cry of your heart. It is almost like the prayer you don't want anyone to know that you're praying.

James: It's baring your soul? Totally open, totally honest

Esther: It's defined actually as an expression of grief or heartache or anguish. But I also want the listeners to know it doesn't necessarily mean you go through the loss that I've experienced. I think every Christian is going to be lamenting here on earth. I think it is part of our prayer time -- even lamenting the sin that is happening in the world.

So lament is an expression of grief but I define it in the book as an expression of grief that God meets you in because I don't believe God ever turns away a lamenting prayer.

James: Oh, that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears that I could weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people, Jeremiah. There is a weeping prophet.

You will speak. You go and share. If viewers said, "Would you come and help us in our church or our group or our study?" How would they communicate with you? What is the website?

Esther: My website is EstherFleece.com. I would love to do that. I do look at the scriptures and I see a lot of weeping prophets and I just wonder where are the weeping pastors now? We've got to relearn this language of lament and I would be so honored to go to churches and help share that message.

James: I hope you will get the book. It is in the bookstores. You might be able to get it on Esther Fleece, on her website. But you could say, "Esther, come speak to our group." If she does, take care of her. Don't invite her in and say, "Well, they'll take care of you down the road." When she gets to you, she is down the road. You take care of her.

Esther, our viewers are the most wonderful people. You love to help. I've never heard you push back. I've never heard you say, "Don't ask me to do that!" It is like you say, "You mean we could help someone? We could save their life or give them a future or give them a clean drink of water, maybe the first they've ever got? Are you telling us, James that you can get kids out of sexual bondage in the sex traffic industry?" Yes!

I want you to listen. I want you to listen beyond the words. I want you to look beyond the scenes and say, "God, I can be the miracle that situation calls for." Watch. Watch! Listen. Pray. Become the hands of Jesus.

Announcer: Human trafficking -- it's a multibillion dollar industry where a trafficked girl can in some cases bring in \$200,000 a year to her owner. The crushing reality is almost two girls are trafficked, mostly children for sexual exploitation every minute of the day.

Sheila: On this trip to Southeast Asia, I've seen the worst things I've ever seen in my life; things that no mother ever wants to see: Children trafficked, dragged away from their homes, kept prisoner, trapped.

But today, I've got to see the other side. I've got to see the great news, what happens when God's people move in and say, "No! Not on our watch."

Here we are at this amazing life center. The children are singing, they're laughing, they're the way children should be.

We brought you these stories. We told you what happens in the streets of Southeast Asia with children who are just the most vulnerable of all, kids who walk out into the back of a brothel and cry out into the night sky, "Is there anybody out there who cares for me? If there is a God, can you see me?" Because of our partners here who love God, who are listening to the Holy Spirit, they go in and they answer those cries and they deliver these children, literally from the pit of hell and they bring them to green pastures and they introduce them to a God who not only sees them, a God who knows their name, a God who has a plan for them, a God who has a future.

The joy that I have seen today, next to the darkness that I saw last night, fades for just a moment. But there is a lot more need out there. We're going to do a lot more. Our partners want to expand this because the thing is we're ministering to these kids, we're saying to them, "You are a child of the King of kings and so we're going to restore all the broken places inside and introduce you to the one person who can transform everything, the one person who can take your darkest night and shine light into that and that is the person of Jesus Christ."

James: I thank God, Sheila for the way you communicate. Betty, just seeing the glimpses of Destiny House that our viewers built, love built it -- love through you. The yielded heart produces the helping hands and the willingness to give. When you see what love does and you see those beautiful young girls being trafficked, they're not happy, they're not excited. One of the things that the porn producers try to do is make the girls or the women that are involved look like it's the most exciting and most fun in all the world. They either convince or whatever but it traps people.

But there is no excitement on the part of these girls. They are truly in bondage. There is nothing there. They're just being held captive and used like a good to be disposed of and cast aside and no care about. It is awful! They are truly slaves that only love can set free.

Betty: And what a blessing to know that we have the opportunity to reach out to these precious children and bring them out of this and give them a safe place to live and to grow up as children.

As Sheila said, children should be able to play and run about and have their friends and feel safe.

But my heart just breaks because I can still hear the cries of some of them, they're crying out, "Will somebody help me?" I know that every time when my children were growing up, if I heard them cry, I was immediately to their side to see what was wrong, where they were hurting, what was going on and I was going to fix it real quick. Well, these children are crying and nobody is hearing them but those that care and love.

You've done this before. You've helped us before with these precious children. Please do it again. You hear the cries. They want someone to say, "It will be okay. There's hope out here."

James: We're going to put loving arms that the mothers and fathers are no longer able to put around them. When we first, and I noticed, Betty as we were showing the Destiny House and the center, we show only, like we showed someone playing a guitar, you couldn't see their face, we showed the children running and playing. Years ago, and I think I can go back, maybe ten years ago or when we first started there, you could see them singing and smiling. But what happened is we found out that if their faces were seen they then become targets to be recaptured and taken away or they became an object, a focus of attack to hurt them. So it is so sad how evil this whole thing is.

But the beauty, I just wish you could see their faces. So many of those little ones, you did see their faces. They're now teachers, they now have their own families. Some of them are even college professors and they're doing a wonderful job. Many of them are providing not only for their family but also for the family they were taken away from because they have got a whole new life.

We have right now committed to rescue 5,000 more right now from sex trafficking. It takes \$128 to bring that rescue to pass; to rescue, to literally reach out, rescue and restore them. And we want to ask you to help us to do that.

Betty, I'm praying that every single person that is watching today will say, "I'm going to rescue a child." Now think about this. We've got a \$200,000 matching gift. You know what that means? That means if you give to rescue a child, \$128 you've just helped rescue two because it gets matched; \$64 doubles to \$128, which means at some level you can participate.

I want you to think about something real important because this is a big challenge: \$1280 rescues ten. Could do you that? We want to send you the beautiful, beautiful "Determined Eagle" bronze -- one of the most beautiful, I believe, our ministry has ever, ever presented; determined to soar on the turbulence of our times and the challenges of the day. We're lifted by God as we lift others. That will now be doubled -- that \$1280 doubled to take care of not ten but

20.

Would you make that gift? At whatever level you can come in, we're going to be sending you the book *Living Amazed* because what you're doing is amazing. The love and grace you share is amazing. We want to say thank you. We have a beautiful journal to offer too to help you in your study and your journey with the Lord.

Would you go online right now, take your bankcard, make the gift God put on your heart? Or would you dial that number? Others have been calling for prayer. You call right now to be an answer to prayer. Please. If you write a check, make it to *LIFE* but call us and tell us what you're putting in the mail. Thank you for doing it.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Innocent children and young people longing to be loved and cared for are being abducted and sold at the hands of violent predators, their spirit and body 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 help restore their lives and give them a future.

Now a generous opportunity of a \$200,000 matching gift means your gift of \$128 to help rescue a child will be matched to help two children. Your \$64 gift will be matched to help rescue one child from the horrors of human trafficking. And a \$32 rescue gift will be doubled to \$64.

With your gift we will send you James Robison's new book, *Living Amazed: How divine encounters can change your life*. As you read these inspiring stories you'll learn how to live amazed in the presence of God 24 hours a day.

With your gift of \$100 or more you'll receive James's new book, along with the companion Amazed Journal so you can record accounts in your own life where you're amazed at God's goodness.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280 which will now help rescue 20 children and you may request our beautiful new "Determined Eagle" bronze sculpture.

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

End of clip

In the studio

James: I want to just say a big thank you. I just want to thank God that Betty and I have recently celebrated our 54th wedding anniversary. One of the things that we see, it's sad, it's a tough part of getting older, we've been to the funerals of a lot of our most precious friends. And one of the things we see about people as they get older, sometimes you look in and you see needs that need to be met and you may wonder how you can.

Let me tell you something. Estate planning can help you bless your family and help you give to extend the outreaches of the Lord all over the world. We have estate planning services that help you know how to bless your family and put God's arms around the world, even after we leave, or as we get older. Give us an opportunity to help you. Make that contact.

If you would like to Esther's book, *No More Faking Fine*, along with the book *Living Amazed*, if you've helped us reach out to rescue and to restore and you'd say, "Would you please send me this book? I think it will really help me." Yes, we will to say thanks because we appreciate you.

Would you join Betty and me saying thanks to Esther Fleece? You're a beautiful witness to the Lord. I'm glad you have that fine husband! And thank you.

Thank you so much for helping us reach out to these precious children. God bless you!