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Week three: WFL

James and Betty Robison

Harmony Dust Grillo

James: I'm so glad you've joined us. I'm curious about our guest. I'm James Robison. Betty and I are thrilled to welcome you to *LIFE Today*. But I'm looking at Harmony, her name is Harmony. When you hear how she was born and how she was treated you think wow, where did that name come from? Then she's got a middle name, Dust. Well, that's all of us -- from the dust. But I'm curious about that. That's kind of an unusual name. Grillo, last name.

Well, this young lady experienced incredible abuse as a girl. As is typical, oftentimes, and she'll tell you, it led her to become an exotic dancer. And then her boyfriend, who I'm sure used her and then became like what was a pimp. He not only exploited her but he used her. She found herself trapped.

Her book is a pretty incredible story. It is called *Scars in Stilettos*. I have an idea she is no stranger to either. I think we need to hear her story. Would you welcome Harmony to *LIFE Today*?

[Applause]

Are you able to feel like you're a part of harmony right now?

Harmony: I feel very harmonious.

James: Do you feel like you're part of a family?

Harmony: I do. God has really restored family to me.

James: You didn't have... I want you to tell our viewers and our audience here about your journey as a girl, a child.

Harmony: So I was raised in a really violent neighborhood where there was a war between the two gangs in my neighborhood. And then also in a really chaotic home. My mother struggled with substance abuse. She is a big part of my story but I do want to say that she wasn't a bad person; she was just a very broken person who parented out of her brokenness.

So yeah, her relationship with my stepdad was also very tumultuous. Because of the environment I was in I also was sexually abused by multiple people, both men and women throughout my life; and then raped as a teen. I can say that now as seemingly casually as I just did, not because it wasn't a big deal -- it was a huge deal -- but I can say it like that because my heart is healed and my past doesn't have a grip on me anymore.

One of my abusers was my mom's boyfriend when I was 13. I finally started standing up for myself and eventually, ran away from home to get away from the situation. So my mom said, "Hey, I'll make sure he is gone. You can come back. Everything is fine." And I did. The only problem was she actually ended up leaving with him.

So she left me for three months when I was 13 and my brother was eight with \$20 and a book of food stamps. So that didn't last very long. I used it on tortillas and butter because that was the cheapest thing I could find. After that, I started stealing from the liquor store to feed us.

It was that summer that I became involved with an older boy in my neighborhood. When he was around I didn't have to steal and risk getting caught and risk having my eight-year old brother, I don't know what would have happened to him if I got caught. This older boy would buy us food. He would make me feel protected. He would tell me, "Anybody

messes with you I've got your back. I'll take care of you."

So he gave me the two things that I always wanted in a male figure, which was protection and provision. I became super attached to him in what I now know is a trauma bond, and ended up in a seven-year long abusive relationship with him. I stayed because I thought all relationships were like that. Genuinely, that was what was modeled to me. And I also stayed because I didn't think I was worth any more. Ultimately, that relationship led me to the commercial sex industry where I worked as a stripper, and essentially he became my pimp. I gave him all my money and he started using me to recruit other women from the club. I never realized that I was being exploited. I was in such a deep place of denial.

For me, the big catalyst, the big game changer was a friend who just loved me unconditionally and accepted me as I was. She would invite me to church but her friendship with me was never contingent on that. And eventually, I just had a chance to see through her life and example that there was something different about her and I wanted to know what that was.

Honestly, I didn't want to go to church. I thought, if there is a God, he wouldn't want anything to do with someone like me. But she eventually kind of got me curious.

Someone else got me a little bit curious too and that was, of all people, the manager of the strip club that I worked in. I always found him to be standoffish and was very intimidated by him. But I went to him one night because I started going to church and I said, "I need my shifts changed for Wednesdays."

He said, "Why?"

I said because I want to go to church first."

As it turns out he was Christian. And we found out back stage that there was a crazy connection.

He was actually the first person to pray for me. He had his briefcase. I went in one night I was so angry. I think I had actually just even attacked a customer; that's how angry I was. He was like, "You can't keep doing this. What's going on?"

I said, "I want to leave. I want to get out."

He said, "Can I pray for you?"

He opened up his briefcase. He had a gun and a bottle of anointing oil. He pulled out the anointing oil. He laid hands on me and prayed that God would help me find a way out of the clubs. He said to me that he had talked to this TV host who had told him that as long as he was stuck there in the clubs that he was in the trenches and that God was going to use him to reach the women working there. I was one of those women and you were the host!

[Laughter]

You can't make that up!

James: I met this guy watching our show and called in, and I prayed with him because he managed all the strip clubs in Los Angeles. And the one that was the closest to the airport, I'd passed it many times going to preach, I passed it and the occasion is I passed it going to Jack Hayford's church. He had a minister's conference. There were 4,000 in front of me, 2,000 or more were ministers and I told the story about this strip club manager, and I was going to stop and preach at that big strip club when I left Jack's church that night.

Harmony: Where I worked.

James: Yeah, where she was and I was going to preach at all of them and give an

invitation because he was going to buy them clothes and try to help them get a job -- and he is the manager of all of them! So this is happening. "He told me he might come attend tonight. Are you here?" And sure enough, he stood up and everybody started clapping. And boy, they were going to pray.

And then the man waited for me and Jack afterwards and he starts crying. He said, "Well, the man that owns all the clubs, he won't let me get you to come. I'm so sorry." But he stayed because I told him, I said, "If you'll keep witnessing and getting those girls out" -- and here's one of them that he got out right here. Pretty exciting when we found that out.

Harmony: I couldn't believe it when you started telling me that part of your story.

James: What's so beautiful is that the man was effective doing, when he saw something moved him, he said, "Now how can I do it?" And by the way, he is no longer doing that.

Harmony: He is out of the clubs also.

James: You're going to try to talk to him and tell him I still love him.

Harmony: I sure am going to! Yes!

James: Tell us some of the other things. I want to know what happened after you were changed and then what God's doing because your story is absolutely phenomenal.

Harmony: Thank you. So after I went on my own healing journey and did a lot of work and God did a lot of work in me, I found myself one night sitting across from that strip club by the airport where I used to work. I really felt like I was sitting outside of a prison that had once held me captive. I was praying for the women. I always prayed every time I passed that club but I knew it was time to do something. I didn't know what.

Honestly, I half thought I was crazy. This is in 2003, at that time, to my knowledge, there

wasn't any kind of strip club outreaches happening or anything like that so I thought, what am I going to do? I'm going to walk into the strip club like, "Hi!" So I started writing notes on the backs of postcards. And the post cards said, "Her value is far above rubies and pearls." I thought, that's exactly the message that I want to communicate to the women.

So I just let them know that they're not alone. Eventually, that moment really was the catalyst for Treasures, which is the ministry that I run today that reaches and serves women in the commercial sex industry.

James: Is that the website if people want to know about it?

Harmony: It is IAmATreasure.com, as if you're saying it about yourself. We wanted that every time they type our website they had to say it: I am a treasure.

James: Wow! Precious treasure. See she is reaching out to these ladies that are in the clubs. This is a wonderful thing. Do you find, and you just explained your story, how you got there. You were basically trapped. Who wouldn't be moved by a 13-year old trying to help take care of a little eight-year old brother?

And then the way it progressed, you found an easier way to get money to take care of him, you're by yourself. And I have witnessed to people in these areas like this and found out that many of them will begin to cry when they find out you seem to have an interest in them. They say, "I don't know what else I would do. I've got to take care of a child. Or I've got to do this..." Some of them say, "I've got to pay my college debt." All the things they say are unbelievable.

Do you think that these are just wicked people, by and large, that are in these clubs?

Harmony: Absolutely not. In fact, about a third of the women that we serve are victims of trafficking. So they were not in the sex industry by choice. The rest of them might say

that they were there by choice but when you look at their stories you see vulnerability. You see up to 90% having had a history of sexual abuse in childhood, rape and abuse. You see poverty, lack of education; 70% of trafficking victims are from the foster care system. So you see all these vulnerabilities.

And then you place them in an environmental context, in a culture that tells them well, you can make easy money selling your body. In a country where we're spending more on the commercial sex industry than the N.F.L., N.B.A. And major league baseball combined, and where women are sexualized in our culture regularly. You place that vulnerable person in that context and it becomes easier to see how she might end up in the commercial sex industry.

The truth is that 89% want to leave but they don't see any other options. So what is choice without options? So that's really part of what we do is we provide them the support and the resources that they need to rebuild their lives. We love them right where they're at. Even if they're not ready to leave yet, we love them right there right where they're at and support them.

Betty: So many of them are like you were, you were 13 -- my goodness! And you meet an older boy that says he wants to take care of you, and he shows an interest in you, and then they fall into that trap.

Harmony: Totally. Absolutely.

Betty: They want someone to care about them.

Harmony: Absolutely.

James: How do they respond when they see your expressions of love? You've trained a lot. You've trained some that are now doing this now overseas, and you've trained them to go. But how do you find the girls respond when the one with love goes in as they're

trained? How do they respond?

Harmony: Very well. We go in with love. We go in with no strings attached. Letting them know that we're here for them if and when they're ready. I mean many of them throw their arms around us, give us hugs, they're crying. Every once in a while you have one that's like, "What are you doing? Why are you doing this?" But it makes sense because they're not used to receiving anything without strings attached. But yeah, their response is really great. They are very receptive. I think it's because they know we genuinely care and we're not trying to bash them over the head with a Bible or tell them they're bad people, we're just here to love them.

Betty: Well, from your testimony, you can tell them you know what they're feeling, what they're going through.

James: You have a joy, Harmony, it is a song listening to you now. Our viewers say, "Harmony, how can..." Perhaps there is someone watching or they know someone that would like to help. Actually say, "I'd want to know..." How would they find out about training opportunities? Would they find that on a website?

Harmony: Yeah, on our website at: IAmATreasure.com we have information. We train people who have a heart to reach women in their city because we can't be everywhere but I fully believe that God is calling people from all over the earth to reach the women right in their cities. So we've been doing this since 2003 and we share everything we've learned over the years so that we can really set people up for a win and equip them to do effective outreach in their cities.

James: Do you have people who help you and support what you're doing?

Harmony: We're funded primarily by individual donors.

James: And you're a 501c3?

Harmony: We are.

James: There is the website. You go there. And if you're impressed to support, do it. Also, if you want information, do you think that if people from various states would write in and say or get on your web and ask the questions that you could somehow give them some insight about where to go to get the training or how to get it through your organization?

Harmony: All the information about training, getting involved is on our website. Also, if there are women out there that are watching and they have been in the commercial sex industry and are feeling trapped and stuck, we also have resources for them and they can go online as well and request support.

James: You know when you first started coming out, and I think it is so important how we as Christians, especially in a church how we make people feel when they come in and they come from let's say the side of life many don't understand, how did you feel the first time you went to church? What was the feeling like?

Harmony: I'm so thankful that I walked into that church and I knew I was home. My life didn't change overnight. My life was still my life. I was still in that relationship. I was still in that job.

James: Did you feel like people there might have had an idea where you came from?

Harmony: Some did, including some of the pastors, and I later found out, they loved me and they didn't treat me any different. What I appreciated about my friend is she didn't try to be the Holy Spirit. She didn't say, "Now that you're in church, Harmony, you need to stop cussing, get off the poles, break up with the boyfriend, put on some clothes, wear longer skirts.

Betty: Allow God to walk through that with you.

Harmony: Right. And what happened is as God did a work in my heart, then that changed the way I thought about myself, the way I thought about him. It led to change in my life ultimately, eventually, but it started with him doing a work in my heart.

James: Do you appreciate the story you're hearing?

[Applause]

I think it's amazing. You have a beautiful, glorious glow. The book, I believe is, well, it's a treasure because it is her story and in so many ways it is his story. You have pictures of you when you were little. It is hard to imagine right here probably this is when there was a lot of abuse going on.

Harmony: That was when I was working in the industry, yes.

James: But you started... this is about when you first started being abused?

Harmony: Much younger. I was three.

James: Well, I want you to know...

Father, I just thank you for Harmony, and what you're doing. I want you to work through her and so many people that will perhaps support what she is doing, and maybe even getting involved in a personal way. Just bless everything she does; in Jesus' name.

You really blessed me by telling me how that guy blessed you. Would you just say thanks to Harmony? Thanks Harmony for sharing your story because your story is his story. It is the life of Christ.

You know Harmony, we have a joy. We're not reaching out and say helping somebody that is gone into some terrible lifestyle but we're reaching out to people that have no chance. They are the ones that are vulnerable but we give them hope.

Our viewers, listen, you're the most amazing people. I know you're going to be praying for Harmony. There is no question about it. You are the neatest people in the world. Thanks for watching *LIFE Today*. One thing, Betty and I, I know you watch, you love Betty. You wonder if Betty is going to say something and Betty always comes out with me and says, "Now don't ask me to say anything. Don't expect me to say anything." But every time you say something, you bless people. You've just got the glorious glow all the time.

But here's the deal. You know if you watch *LIFE Today*, you're not only going to hear the life of God today, you're going to be able to give somebody life today. You know what? You don't turn away. You see needs that are very legitimate and you see an effective way to meet it and you say, "Count me in." Thank you. I'm not just thanking you for a ministry, I'm thanking you for people's lives that have been totally changed. I'm thanking you for children's lives that have been saved, their parents saved, their whole life changed.

I want you to listen to one of our best friends, Tammy Trent, gifted musician, writer, and communicator.

Now listen to me. This girl is one of the greatest missionaries we know now. Not only here in America and in the civilized advanced countries, but third world; she is ready to go to the ends of the earth. She lost her husband, basically a skilled professional type swimmer and he drowned a long time ago. She lost the love of her life. But the first love, has carried her life. I want you to listen to Tammy. She's representing not only you but Jesus. I want you to listen to what she says and then you say, "Count me in." Listen to Tammy.

On the mission field

Tammy: James and Betty, I've been partnering with you guys for years, and what a privilege it is for me to travel the world with you and to tell the story of so many people. I've gotten to spend some time with Violet today and it is another heartbreaking story. I want you to hear it.

>> My child, he became sick because we used this dirty water. So I took him to a hospital. But because it was very far away from here my child lost a lot of blood. All they could say at the hospital was that he had a lack of blood. In the end he died. His name was Ellis.

Open Captions:

>> How old was he?

>> He was three years old.

Tammy: I know it is hard for you to continue to share your story and talk about your loss. But I'm going to take this story and I'm going to be able to share it with people that I believe can help you, and that can bring clean water to you and your family, the rest of your children, and this entire village.

End of clip

In the studio

James: Boy, Tammy said, "I'm going to share your story with people I believe would want to help you."

Our dear mission friend, Peter Pretorius is in heaven with our daughter Robin right now. And there is no question that as a great cloud of witnesses I think they often look down.

And I think Peter says -- probably, Peter and Robin said, "I sure hope all those people will keep helping." Because Peter said basically what Tammy said, "I'm going to tell people I think will want to help you." And to Peter, that meant if I tell James and Betty they're going to tell the viewers of *LIFE Today*.

And Peter would always say, "I know they're going to help." Because you are amazing people. The reason you're an amazing person is because there is an amazing grace that is within you that is the Lord Jesus and you're expressing his life and his love. You are looking at the least of these and not turning away.

Betty, I believe our viewers, I believe our viewers are going to be the answer that Tammy asked for and prayed for and hoped for.

Betty: I do too. There is nothing like the heartbreak of a mother losing her child. I don't care what age they are, I know -- I lost my child. But you know the great thing about it is we have an opportunity here to save the lives of these children. The big problem they have is the diseased water. They have no fresh water to give their babies.

We can be that channel of blessing taking that water to these precious children so that their mothers don't have to tell their babies good-bye because they had no water, no clean water.

Please join with us. Let's be that channel of blessing that connects to these precious children and to these mothers that love their babies so much.

James: Well, I've said it many times, but it's still worth repeating. Had you known a cure, a perfect cure for our daughter there is no question in my mind you would have sent it to us or you would have delivered it in person. I really believe that. Well, there is a perfect cure for these children that we're talking about, for these families, it works -- that's clean water. "Just a cup of water," Jesus said, "You give it, and you won't lose your reward." And let him determine the reward because to me, it is reward enough to know

that I became a miracle in their life, I gave them a miracle.

Give a cup of water, what about giving a well of water? Look what that does for so many. Would you give a well if you can? They're \$4800 right now. I'm being told that cost is going up. Right now we have targeted the 200 wells to drill them and they're \$4800. If you can drill one, please do. If you can give \$1200 or \$2400 and three people match your \$1200 and somebody match your \$2400 we've got another well. But most of the money comes in gifts of \$48 or \$144. I use those figures because \$48 will give ten people water the rest of their life. What an incredible use of \$48! \$144 -- 30 people water the rest of their life; that's how it pretty well breaks down.

Would you place a well in those villages where they've never had clean water? Would you release that healing stream of love? Right now if you will simply get your bankcard or you want to write a check, make it to *LIFE*, but you go and get your bankcard and dial that phone number or go online and say, "Here's the gift God's put on my heart" and use that card like a check. Would you do it? If you write a check and plan to mail it, call us and tell us you're sending it because we need to know, we're going to let the missionaries know, "take off" in all of those areas, get the equipment in. You bought the equipment, by the way, viewers of *LIFE Today*, the drilling equipment.

So would you right now please go get the card? Don't just think about it, I know you care, take action. Go do it. Thank you so much. We have some gifts to send you to say thank you in behalf of so many people you're going to touch with love. Thank you so much for doing it.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Today, a mother living in extreme poverty will do the unthinkable -- give her children dirty, diseased-filled water that she knows could kill them. With no other choice what's a mother to do?

With your help, clean water is on the way. Mission Water for LIFE provides a way for parents to save the lives of their children, to offer them a bright future free from the fear of death. With your gift today, you can help drill and establish the first 200 water wells of the year. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five children, a gift of \$48 will help provide for 10, \$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 the *Praying Grace* 55-day devotional. This new devotional will help you renew your mind to the realities of God's grace and help you pray powerful grace-based prayers for each day.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "Praying Grace" tumbler. This reusable 16-ounce container is constructed with insulated stainless steel, perfect for hot or cold beverages.

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 and you may request the beautiful, new commemorative bronze sculpture, "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of clip

In the studio

James: Well, Betty and I just join many mothers and families to say thanks for the miracle you have provided. *Praying Grace* is an incredible 55-day devotional journal. I'm telling you, it is going to bless you. The tumbler, Betty says she loves it. You can put hot or cold drink in it. "I am Praying Grace" scripture verse. We're just sending gifts to you to say thank you. The shepherd holding the little lamb. That's our shepherd, he's holding us.

We're like lambs to him. If you'd like to have Harmony's book, say, "I'd really like to read the story. I'd like to maybe share it with someone that it will really be a blessing to." You just give a cup of water, say, "Send it to me." We'll be glad to do it.

Would you join Betty and me in telling Harmony thanks for sharing?

[Applause]

You be sure to tell our friend hello. Okay?

Harmony: I will!

James: Thank you so much. Thanks for watching. Thanks for sharing.