

3/9/20

Week 11: Rescue Life

James and Betty Robison

Rebecca Bender

James: Thank all of you. I welcome you to *LIFE Today*. I'm James Robison. Betty and I want you to know this is probably going to be one of the most amazing weeks you've ever watched on *LIFE Today* because of the miraculous stories you're going to hear and the lessons, the inspiration that you're going to receive. It is like miraculous inspiration of miraculous acts of God today, New Testament type miraculous acts of God.

This is an amazing story, *In Pursuit of Love*: One woman's journey from trafficked to triumphant. Rebecca Bender was trafficked. Powerful, powerful book! I want you to welcome Rebecca to *LIFE Today*. Would you do that? Thank you. I want you to cover some ground pretty fast. How in the world does a lovely girl, not a little girl here in the United States, land of the free, home of the brave get trafficked?

Rebecca: Yeah! I think this is a stereotype and a misconception that so many people have that trafficking only happens to kidnapped children in foreign countries. And what's important for people to realize is that domestic survivors, domestic victims like myself, we too grow up with those same stereotypes. So when we get in really dangerous situations we think, well, we must not be being trafficked, that's for kidnapped kids in other countries.

So we're not even realizing ourselves how trafficking here in the U.S. can look. We're not realizing when the water is heating up around us. I'm a '80s kid. I grew up being taught "stranger danger." Don't go to the white minivan that is offering a free puppy and candy; right? That's not how trafficking works in our country necessarily because that's not what

sells.

In our country right now sex sells, unfortunately, and we have to be thoughtful around, there are people that are trying to cash in on a piece of that multi-billion industry. And they're looking for vulnerable people in every community across the United States.

James: What happened to you? How did you become vulnerable?

Rebecca: I grew up in a small town in southern Oregon, kind of a lumber town. My dad worked at the lumber mill. I was an average, just All-American small-town girl. We had the football players were on the float in the parade at our town. I mean it was really "Friday Night Lights" type of community.

I wasn't raised in a faith-based home. I had a praying grandma, praying aunt. She took me to Sunday school once in a while when I would stay the night, but my parents didn't really live for the Lord and they divorced when I was nine. It was a really ugly divorce. That created some vulnerabilities even in a good home that left me feeling unimportant, unwanted. My dad drank really heavy after the divorce. My mom was suddenly a single mom trying to make ends meet. So we had a couple of years of poverty.

But by the time I went into the eighth-grade things had turned around and I was a gregarious kid in school. I was a varsity athlete all through high school; played varsity soccer and a cheerleader and track team. I was on the honor roll. I was on prom court. I would have never been put in an at-risk youth category. And yet, I still had this deep-seeded need to love and to be loved.

I think so many people can relate with this feeling of wanting to belong, wanting to be a part of something. Wanting to get out of their small town and see the world. And so when I found myself pregnant at 18, after I'd graduated from high school, I met a man that had all those answers. He told me that he had a great job in another city and there was this adventure and ambition that I didn't see in my small town. I was enamored and I fell in

love. The whole time he was a con artist and he was a trafficker. And so I'm thinking "stranger danger" the whole time; right? I'm looking for kidnapping and here is this man who subtly over six months, grooming me, reeling me in little by little until he moved me and my daughter to Las Vegas. And then he forced me...

James: How old was your daughter when you made that move?

Rebecca: She may have been around one years old at that time. But he really used her.

James: Did you have any idea what was going to happen when he moved you there?

Rebecca: No! Absolutely not.

James: Did you actually trust him a little bit?

Rebecca: I trusted him entirely.

James: He conned you into believing that he was trustworthy?

Betty: And that he would take care of you?

Rebecca: Right! And that his job was relocating him. You're 19. We all probably remember being 19 and making not always the best decisions. But especially when you have roots of vulnerability that even kids from all walks of life have. But traffickers are looking for the vulnerable people in our communities. They're looking for the most at-risk people and that's who they're targeting and offering all of the answers to all of their struggle is what they come with. You really want to believe it. You want to get out of our situation. You want a better life for your kids. You want the things that are in your heart that God actually placed there, and sometimes you don't have the capacity or the mentoring to know how to get there.

And so if the church doesn't come around our vulnerable people in our communities, someone else will. And so it is so important that we can all do something in the fight against human trafficking.

James: Okay, tell me now the progression. You're now in Vegas, which is probably a pretty easy place to make somebody available. So tell me the process. What happened?

Rebecca: So the day that we arrived he took my daughter, forced me into human trafficking. I can remember leaving the first house that he had taken me to. I wasn't allowed to drive; he was the only one with a vehicle. I can remember looking out the window and just starting to cry and thinking, how did I get here? I was a good kid from a good home. Like how did I get here? And now I'm so embarrassed to call home. I'm so ashamed to call home. I'm so ashamed. I've crossed lines that I was taught not to cross.

I thought that it would end if I just made the moving money back. He kept saying he just wanted the moving money back and then it would be over. He would take you from home to home to home or hotel to hotel to hotel. So he didn't take you to one building. He would drive you around to whomever was calling and making appointments from the online ads. It is not dark web; it is any website that anybody can access. It is shocking that it is so prevalent.

But yeah! So by that point I just started to become very hopeless and I didn't know what to do and I didn't know how to get out of the situation. A lot of people say, "You should just run. Why didn't you just call 911? Call your family?" And my answer generally is, "I did run, that's why I'm sitting here today."

Why didn't I run sooner? I had multiple attempted escapes. There was a time when I ran home, and he followed me all the way to my home in my small town. And it made me realize I'm not safe. He knows where I live, and he knows where my family lives.

James: Did he make threatening statements that you had better stay in line or you'd be

hurt or in trouble or others would be hurt?

Rebecca: Yeah. He not only constantly threatened harm of me and my child but he actually did harm us. Over the next six years of my life of being trafficked I was bought and sold between three different traffickers. Two of them tattooed their names on my back like a piece of cattle so I could be returned to my owner. I had my face broken in five places. I had several attempted escapes. I've had multiple arrests and now I have a criminal record. You just get hopeless.

I started using drugs. By 21 I was a full-blown addict and my family showed up in Vegas. They were concerned and they took my daughter. At that point I just got hopeless. I thought now there is no reason for me to live. She's safe, she is away from him. And I tried to kill myself.

But I was, through all of this, through my pursuit to love and be loved, God was pursuing me the whole time and I didn't even really know he was real. And little by little he kept tapping on my heart and tapping on my shoulder.

I can remember coming out of this hotel once and there was another girl who was being trafficked and she said, "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

I thought, oh what's this girl going to try to do? And so I stepped to the side in a parking garage. And she said, "I don't know if you know God, but I have this overwhelming feeling that I need to tell you that Jesus loves you."

And I started crying, like bawling hysterically and hiding my face in my hands. And she put her hand on my shoulder and she said, "Do not be afraid. God wants you to know that he loves you."

Later on I got radically saved and delivered from drug addiction at the altar. And I would read in the Bible where Moses hid his face in his hands and the spirit of the Lord said,

"Do not be afraid." I just thought, is this real? Is this book that was written thousands of years ago, actually the exact same experiences that were happening to me when I was in sin? And it was this moment of just realizing God is still in the business of delivering people from addictions to keeping his hand on any child who is lost, whose family is worried.

And while many people might not relate with feeling trafficked, we all can relate with feeling trapped -- trapped in maybe a dead-end job or a feeling of hopelessness, trapped in wondering where your kids are and if they're ever going to come home? Trapped in sometimes even just toxic friendships where you're realizing this is not the crowd that I really feel God calling me to.

So this book, while it is my story of transformation, I hope that people are able to see what their pursuit for love and that God can do anything in their lives; and that he is with them even in the midst of what feels like a trapped despair. He's still there through it all.

And we talk about being light to the world and salt to the world and yet, sometimes I think we don't realize that God is out talking to sinners right now. He is using the things that they're interacting with every single day like he did with me.

And when I ask my family what they did a lot during my time being trafficked, my aunt who is a strong believer said that she would pray every day that the Christians around me would be faithful; that if someone was next to me in a grocery store line or there was another mother in the same school as my kid, and if they were a believer that they would say something. And they'd pray.

So we get to be that. There are families right now of trafficked people that are praying for you to do something and to be that faithful Christian. I'm just so honor to be able to share the message of hope and hopefully give people some inspiration that it's never too late.

James: Well, you're doing that. Don't you think she is doing that right now to let you

know no matter where you've been? I like this statement on the back cover which says, "Your past does not have to determine your destiny." Jesus makes a masterpiece out of the broken pieces of a broken life, however we got there. You were used and abused.

When you went back, away from your home there, did you go back to Vegas and is that where you met this Christian witness? Was it there or was it back home? Where did you begin to find this interaction that helped you?

Rebecca: It was everywhere. I think that's what we hoped to really bring to life in the book is that God is actually in constant pursuit of us. Towards the very end when it was time for me kind of leave it all behind and run after the call of God, choosing technically homelessness to say, I don't know what you have for me but I know you're real now and I want to know why you saved me when others had died. Just this innate feeling that God pursues us. Like the prodigal son, I felt, when I came back to the Lord, I can remember opening my Bible and feeling like it just came alive in the blink of an eye.

And for so long, I had this belief that no one intended but it felt like the big C church, had this implicit, made me feel implicitly that if I didn't clock in a certain number of hours of prayer or I didn't read by Bible a certain number of hours every day that I couldn't hear the voice of God.

And so when I opened the word for the first time after running and it just came alive again, it felt like my father ran to meet me right where I was at with all my filth, all my sin, all my hardness, all the bad character that I had developed, that he just ran to meet me and the Word of God came to life immediately. I could hear his voice again.

And I thought, this isn't what I was taught. I thought that I had to go to church for a certain number of time before I could hear you. And it was this moment of realizing that he is a father that desperately wants relationship with us. That he is pursuing us in the midst of all of the trauma. He is there!

Betty: Is this where your heart is now, is to minister to people that have gone through similar situations that are just looking for God and don't know they're looking for God?

Rebecca: Yeah! I mean I just wanted originally to be normal and maybe work in a woman's home was my thought, and just have a normal job and get married and have a white picket fence and a dog named Spot. That was my dream from the beginning that my trafficker lured me away with. So I knew it was a dream that God had put in my heart. And after I found my husband, God connected me with him at church and he's just been an amazing man. We had a couple more kids.

One morning I was doing my devotions and the sun started to come up and what should be beautiful for most people made me sick to my stomach and I felt that familiar voice from my trafficker that it was time to go in. And I suddenly knew that the Lord said, "How can you sit here and do nothing? How can you sit here in your nice comfy house with your warm cup of coffee when you know what it is like to be more afraid to go home than you are to get in a car with a stranger?" And in that moment, I thought, you're right! How can I? And so we stopped what we were doing, started a nonprofit, began just wanting to train community professionals that had an opportunity to interact with victims.

James: It is now a ministry. What's the name of the ministry?

Rebecca: It is called the Rebecca Bender Initiative.

James: And that's the website?

Rebecca: RebeccaBender.org. You can learn more about all of the initiatives that we do to help raise awareness about human trafficking in America.

James: We can do something about it miraculous. But we have literally set free from trafficking, and it is so sad when they're just little children. And men want to prey on these little children and their sold and they're told they get a job and they have nothing.

And oftentimes, they're traded by their parents for a radio or a little bit of money and they tell them they're going to take them in and get them educated and get them a job. It's terrible -- it happens! But love sets people free.

And so what you're doing right now is trying to help right here in the states and wherever, and if people want to know you can go and share in their community or their church; right? What God is leading you to do and help inspire people to know how to begin doing something in their own community. Am I right about that?

Rebecca: Absolutely! And now I have my master's in biblical studies. We do a ton of different events. Whether it's speaking and teaching at different churches and women's events on just resilience and transformation and redemption.

But also helping other women who have been through real hardship to figure out what are you going to do with the rest of your life? You were rescued, you've been able to escape, yes! But now what? You're sitting there, sleeping on someone's couch and you're wondering what does God have for me? Is this it? Right back to the same vulnerabilities that got me trafficked in the first place. And we want people to know that's not it. That's not all God has for you.

James: Just as you were reached God's love will reach others, but he uses individuals to flow that love. And this is a phenomenal book. You can obviously get it in the bookstores, on Amazon, online. I would highly suggest you get it.

And the website there, you see it there on the screen. If you forgot it, you can call our phone center for prayer and say, "Give me that communication." I believe many of you will help her.

Would you just say thank you, Lord! And thank you, Rebecca for giving your testimony but also for trying to help people, and help others find freedom.

I believe you're going to hear as straight from the heart of God through Sheila Walsh right now, Rebecca and all of you, the most beautiful expression of compassion that's possible to flow through a yielded vessel. Sheila's been a tremendous blessing. But here's what you need to know. What she's moved by is the spirit and love of God. And we literally, we as believers, as the family of God are the very ones who can lift people out of the pit of hopelessness and plant their feet on a solid foundation of hope and peace and joy and purpose.

Watch closely but just know this, if you're available, you're going to become one of the greatest miracles that is possible to be and share in this lifetime.

On the mission field:

Sheila: Sex trafficking is the worst kind of prison I've ever seen. I've been in maximum security prisons. I've talked to women on death row. There is a worse kind of prison than that and that's sex trafficking because it is pure evil.

Open captions:

>> I was blindfolded and locked inside a room. A guard at the door brought in many men every night.

>> The men make me take drugs. If I don't do what they want I will get beaten.

>> They said, "We have no problem in killing you. We have done it many times. We will kill you and throw you out of the window. There will be no help for you."

Sheila: We will rise up and we will change this, and we will do it because -- our whole thing here at *LIFE* is reach, rescue, restore. Reach her and let her know, hey! There is a better way for you to live your life. You don't have to do this. Rescue -- go into these horrible bars and clubs and brothels and rescue these girls. And then restore them; bring them to a place where they can learn their value in Christ. The value that God places on

their life is not diminished by what they have to do every night. And because of that we get to tell them you're not a number. We will step in. We will say, "Let us be your spiritual mom and dad much let us be your big sister in Christ. Let us be the ones who come and fight for you because you are worth fighting for."

End of video

In the studio:

James: Betty, don't you want to see every single person watching us right now say, "God, let us together put your arms around those precious, precious lives and rescue them." It's hard to believe anything like that can even be happening. But we've seen what God's love through our viewers does to set people free and I'm praying everybody will have a part. I'll tell them exactly how in a moment.

Betty: It's hard to watch something like that when we've grown up in the surroundings that we have, and now we've even heard that it happens so much in our own world -- in our own nation. But it's just spread worldwide, and we've got to realize that these precious children are trapped, not by their own choice but they're trapped, so many of them. They're crying out for help. They don't know what else to do.

But we can be that hope and that help for them if we'll just reach out with our love and with our gifts. We can go and put them in a new lifestyle, one that they never dreamed they would have. And that's knowing God and knowing God's love.

James: What we're asking you to do is be a part of reaching them, and it is miraculous how they're reached. We'll be showing you beautiful people who stand and watch for vulnerable children, knowing that they're going to be exploited and giving them a future.

We're asking you if you would right now help us. Just think about the miracle of this because some of our viewers, and just people that love God, know this is so important. They have put up immediately a \$250,000 matching gift for whatever you do right now to

help. The average gift to reach one and start the process of restoring them ultimately is \$128. That is like a miracle. But that's going to be doubled. That will reach one person but now it will reach two because it is matched. Or \$64 now some people say, "James, I don't know the \$128 will be a stretch for me." But \$64 now is doubled and matched so we reach another.

Then we take them on to the restoration process. Now keep this in mind, \$1280 and there are some of you who can give far more than that but \$1280 will reach 10 but now 20, it's doubled.

Here's what I want you to see. Betty, you have on your wrist, hold this up just where they can see it. These are beautiful little bracelets that have been made by the girls that have been trafficked because part of the restoring process is putting them to work. And they begin to earn a living by learning how to do something.

They have also made these tote bags and it has that very message that we're talking about, about reaching, rescuing, and restoring. And it is a really nice tote bag and it has extra pockets on it. Betty got a tote bag the other day given to us by one of the Indian nations. It was beautiful and she made the comment, "I need some little dividers in it." Well, these girls over there figured that out. By the way, it was a beautiful gift.

Please know this. You're giving freedom and hope and a future. We have a beautiful bronze that we're giving. Boy, you heard the burden of some girls that have been hurt. You heard a mother share during our time together here about the concern and the hurt that comes to so many. And only God can heal it.

Would you right now go online please or dial that number? Would you get your bankcard and use it like a check to make one of the greatest love gifts you'll ever make? Boy, you talk about setting somebody free! Giving them a chance at a life they never even dreamed would ever be theirs, and that's the life we find in Christ. Would you demonstrate that love please by reaching out, rescuing, and restoring one of these

precious, precious women, precious girls, children, and yes, boys? Please do it right now. Thank you so much!

Begin video clip

Announcer: Behind the bright lights there is a darkness where a world of innocence is lost and abuse runs rampant scarring the souls of children with no one and nowhere to turn for help. With bodies broken and hopes crushed, these young victims are trapped in a never-ending nightmare.

Today you can shine the light of God's love in this dark world to reach, rescue, and restore these young ones to the life God designed for them to live. With a generous \$250,000 matching gift, now your gift of \$128 to reach, rescue, or restore one child can be doubled to help *two* children. Your \$64 gift will be matched to help save one child from the horrors of human trafficking. And a \$32 mission rescue gift will be doubled to \$64.

With your gift we'll send you this beautiful "Freedom" bracelet handcrafted by survivors of human trafficking who want to say thank you for helping those still trapped. Wear it as a wonderful reminder to pray for the outreach.

With your gift of \$128 or more you'll receive the "Freedom" tote. This quality canvas tote bag is made by trafficked survivors who are now learning a new trade and includes spiritual life resources such as books, devotionals, CD's, or DVD's.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280 which will now help rescue 20 children! And you may request our beautiful new bronze sculpture, "A Mother's Strength." Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio:

James: Well, I'm just really trusting God for one of the greatest responses we've ever had in the history of our ministry right now. I'm telling you what. We're going to rescue as many as you enable us to rescue, and we're going to see them restored.

If you'd like to have Rebecca's book, it's a story that's too often too familiar and it's a miracle story. She is available, she and her husband to help in your area. There's the website. If you need more information, you can ask for it, even in our phone center. But if you'd like to have this book just say, "James, if I help would you send us Rebecca's book to say thanks also?" Yes, we will. We want to be a blessing to you.

Would you join Betty and me in saying thanks to Rebecca again for being a blessing to us? Thank you so much for being with us today. God bless you in your journey.

Thank you for watching! Thank you so much for your help.