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Week 13: Rescue Life

James and Betty Robison

Maria Durso

JAMES: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm James Robison. My wife Betty and I are so glad to be sharing this time. We have a guest. This is... And you're not going to believe but she is close to our age. But she actually listened to me through the '70s, and maybe late '60s even in the crusades, and all the way into the '80s where I'm living in stadiums and coliseums, huge crowds. Well, she remembers it well. I said, "Well, you do know now to remember all those days you've got to be kind of close to our age, up in your 70s." And she said, "Gotcha!" And she is of course.

Maria Durso is absolutely a miracle of God. Brooklyn Tabernacle is a fabulous church. She and her husband pastored the first church that they started as a branch there, and it was also in Brooklyn; I think it was called Christ Tabernacle. But I want you to know that we're so thrilled to have Maria.

I want to say this to you because you can get these on Amazon, or you can go and we'll give you Maria's website. But you can get this recent book, *Ageless* and then *From Your Head to Your Heart*, which we're going to be talking about. So Maria, normally we have a studio full of people and everybody starts clapping. And so at home, they're all clapping. But we're just glad to have you on *LIFE Today*.

MARIA: I'm honored to be here. I really am. And I have watched you for many years. You have me buying wells just so you know. And in New York, you don't get many Christian TV shows in the '70s and you were one that we would watch.

JAMES: We were actually on WOR which at that time it actually was spread out into other cities too. It is still a very major powerful station. I think we're still there. But I'm glad that you

watched us.

I want us to talk about basically, the very fact that you were born is a miracle because your mother was five months pregnant with you and was giving birth, and died in birth; I guess they had to do what, a C-section?

MARIA: Yes, so my mother from the moment she got pregnant, she started to suffer from terrible headaches. This is 1950, there were no MRI's, no CAT scans. And the doctor said, "Well, it's just the pregnancy in the first trimester. They'll dissipate." But by the time my mother was five months pregnant my father would come home, he would find her with a towel wrapped around her head banging her head against the wall. They rushed her to the hospital, and they found that she had an inoperable brain tumor. She went into a coma. They cut me out, five months pregnant, I was two and a half pounds. What are the odds in 1950 for a baby to survive?

JAMES: Virtually impossible.

MARIA: The day my mother died my father basically died, not physically but emotionally. And I was placed in New York Foundling Hospital where they put orphans. I have no name on my birth certificate; my name is "Baby." Nobody named me because nobody ever thought I would live. I was a very, very sickly baby and didn't leave the hospital until I was eight months old.

JAMES: You had some kind of journey. Take us on that journey because you really got in a mess. You did not go the right direction. You were not where anybody would ever think God's going to show up. Tell us about that journey.

MARIA: So eight months old, my father takes me home. This is 1950, no such thing as single parent households. His best friend was a glass of scotch. He would look out the window; he would cry for my mother. My father owned a nightclub. My mother was a nightclub singer. So there was nothing about God in the family, so to speak. So at two and a half years old, my father decides he's going to put me in a religious boarding school. He feels in this place my needs are going to be met. Someone will have the wherewithal to give me three square meals a day. I'm

going to bond with women. There were no women in my life.

So I remember like it was yesterday, my father driving up this gravel road and stops in front of this huge convent and the doors were like hundreds of feet high to me. And he takes me out of the car and he takes out my little suitcase. And he bends down and he says, "Maria, I'll come and see you when I can." And that was very few and far between.

JAMES: How old were you?

MARIA: I was two and a half.

JAMES: Wow!

MARIA: And those doors opened and everything my father thought would happen didn't happen. In this place I was beaten. I'm left-handed. I was told I was a child of the devil. I was told, "You're a child of the devil, Maria. You're a child of the devil." I would be put in a tub of hot water to get the devil out of me. The little girls, they went home every weekend, but I didn't. So I was given a little glass of wine and I would wake up in bed with someone that represented God. I would be woken up in the middle of the night, put in a dark stairway for no reason.

The little girls would come back from being at home and they would open their suitcase. And to me, their suitcase smelled like love and they would take out little cards from their mommy and daddy and little sachets. And they would put it on the dresser because our world was a bed, dresser, bed, dresser. I wasn't looking at the card and I wasn't looking at the sachet, I was looking at the lipstick mark on their cheek because that lipstick mark meant no one was going to give them a glass of wine or beat them.

But the sentence that shaped my life was, "God didn't think you deserved a mother. God doesn't think you deserve a mother, Maria, that's why you don't have a mother." So you could imagine my thoughts about God. They were very twisted. I never thought that maybe God preserved my life at two and a half years old for a reason. I didn't know that.

Well, anyway, my father ended up showing up. I was ten years old. Now he did come a few times, but they would tell me, don't tell him because he doesn't want you. So when my father would pick me up and say, "How's everything, Maria?" I would say, "Fine, Daddy. Just fine." Because my father was so fragile.

And somehow, I grew up with the thought that I gave my mother a brain tumor because she died on my birthday. We never celebrated my birthday. My father cried for my mother, that's what he did, all the days of his life.

He takes me home. I'm ten years old because he discovered the abuse. He shows up. I have marks on my face and chunks of hair pulled out of my head. And now I have a different battle to fight. Now it is an inner-city school, and it is co-ed. I'd never been around boys before and because I'm a new girl the boys like me. Because the boys like me, the girls hate me; and the girls would chase me home every day. The girls were like Philistines. They were like the tallest girls you ever saw. I would run home every day and I would get in that apartment and I'd be like...and my father would say, "How's everything, Marie?" I'd say, "Fine Daddy! Just fine!"

Until one day the Philistines caught me, and they ripped my blouse. I held my blouse shut but with my other hand I had to fight back. And when I went to fight my thumb snapped back and it broke. And I couldn't go home and tell my father that my thumb was broken because he was too busy looking out the window crying for my mother. And to this day look at it, it's a whole different size. And I say there are things in our life they've never been set right. It is a certain movement, it is a certain smell, it is a certain block, it's a certain song. But I am here today because I truly believe that as you give God every issue, it's not overnight, but every issue he makes every crooked bone straight in your life. He really does.

Well, I get in this fight with the girls and now I become like them. I become tough. I'm ten years old. I'm going into liquor stores in Manhattan and I'm buying cheap wine. And I'm lying unconscious in the street in what we call the meatpacking district. Very chic but in those days, that's really where they slaughtered the animals. And the blood of the animals would roll down

the sidewalk and I would be lying in that blood unconscious. And no one ever told me that there was a God that loved me. I was always searching, I want to say for that lipstick mark. I was always searching for that approval. And I started to do now, smoke weed at 12. Then 13, 14, I'm doing ups, downs. And by the time I was 18 I was sticking a needle in my arm. I sent pictures of me on drugs. Our drug dealer found them years after I got saved. I felt the Holy Spirit say, "I preserved these pictures because I want people to see what I can do in a life."

I've overdosed on heroin three times. I've been hit by a car. I've been arrested. I tried to commit suicide, but obviously God had a plan. But I didn't know that.

JAMES: Your story has gone down a journey that looks like the dead end is death or this is impossible. You began to date someone and the two of you were druggies together. You go to Mexico. Now I want to know why did you even go to Mexico? Was it more access to corruption or what?

MARIA: No. It was a vacation. My father dies, he left me a lot of money. My husband came from a pretty not wealthy family, they worked hard. They owned a family pasta business, but they had money. And we decide to move in together. I have everything the world says I need in order to be happy. I have designer luggage, humongous diamond earrings, the man of my dreams and we go on this vacation in Mexico. We had just moved in together. We had two mattresses and a telephone.

JAMES: You're not married?

MARIA: Not married. So we go on our way. I smuggle in about \$3,000 worth of cocaine. I get there and I'm so empty. I'm thinking that this man is going to fill the void in my life. First I thought it was the designer luggage or the partying or knowing famous people but I was so empty. Anyway, we are in this vacation and I'm emptier and emptier. If there was an echo inside of me screaming help it would have had a voice. It's the fifth day to the ten-day vacation and my boyfriend goes out for a walk on the beach.

I stay in the room and I start to talk to God. But I don't talk to him the way we talk to him now. I start cursing him out and shaking my fist and saying what kind of God are you? What is this thing called life? I feel like a dog chasing her tail. And in this room this holy God that should have struck me dead, said my name. The name that's not on my birth certificate. It wasn't external, it was internal. It was like mercury in a thermometer, and it filled me all the way up.

And he said, "Maria, give me your life before it's too late." And I knew that I knew that it was God. I felt this great sense of hope and worth. And in an instant I never wanted to do the things I was doing. I didn't...

My boyfriend came back in the room and I said, "Michael, when we go back home will you go to church with me?" I didn't even know there were other churches other than a Catholic church.

He said, "Church?" He said, "You need to smoke a joint. You need to get high."

Anyways, five days to this ten-day vacation was the longest vacation of our lives. I didn't want to sleep with him anymore. I didn't want to do drugs anymore. I wanted to go and find the voice. When we're leaving, they offer me a job and I turned to him and I said, "That's the devil. He doesn't want me to go home and go to church."

Well, I get home and I call a friend of mine with the telephone that I had. I dial the phone and I said, "Barbara, I need God in my life."

And Barbara said, "Praise the Lord!"

I said, "Praise the who? What does that mean?"

She said, "Maria, while you were gone," we were gone ten days, she said some hippie preached the gospel to her and 30 of our friends. And she said, "After we accepted Christ, we joined hands and we said, "Lord, save Michael and Maria in Mexico." That was the night that voice spoke to me in that hotel room.

She took us to church that night. My boyfriend didn't want to go. But when that pastor said, in a little Pentecostal church, he said, "If you were to die tonight would you know where you would spend eternity?" And I knew I wasn't going to the good place. And I don't know how I got to the front, but I felt like a million angels came and washed all this filth and rage off of me. And when I looked to my right, my boyfriend was kneeling next to me sobbing.

We accepted Christ. We went home that night. We separated the mattresses. We got married on a rainy Monday in City Hall. And when we were married 40 years in 2015, we got married in our church, our three sons are pastors, with our eight grandchildren. We finally did it right.

JAMES: Betty, you know you don't...you're just such an awesome listener.

BETTY: I'm just sitting here thinking, your life, you started out with nothing--nothing was going good. You got into the drugs and then your dad passes away, he leaves you with all this money. You meet the boyfriend, he has plenty of money, then you have everything you want but no happiness.

MARIA: No happiness. Empty!

BETTY: It took God, it took Jesus to change your life. So you can have everything or nothing but without Jesus no purpose.

MARIA: It is the same.

JAMES: And now you've become a minister, and your husband and you have joy unspeakable full of glory. I want to turn our attention to those of you who are watching right now. And I want to talk to you like you always had wished a father would talk to you and now you've got one that does talk to you. And you know who your father is.

MARIA: Yes, I do.

JAMES: Let me just say this to you. That this story is his story manifest in her life, a miracle to even be alive. The accuser started taking her down. All the things that she ever heard were the accuser, which is Satan the deceiver, the destroyer, death, the murderer of every precious thing. And he dragged her around, now think about this, some of her friends met the father through Jesus and those friends changed by the love of that Father experienced personally led them to pray together and they prayed for her. Everybody watching us, Maria needs to understand that prayer is not a last resort, it ought to be a first way. Because if you think for one moment...

Here's what you've got to understand. When you look back through your life, you can even look back over the past years, the positive things that happen, greater security, no real war raging except within our own streets when we are out of control in rebellion or self-seeking and self-serving, but all the positive things that happened, happened because of answered prayer. And answered prayer is what will shape things today. Your life appeared to be impossible. God answered prayer and you became the miracle, you and your husband are the result and now all the people you've touched. You can go to the website...

Tell us the website if they want to get the books that you've got.

MARIA: It's on Amazon.

JAMES: On Amazon?

MARIA: Yes.

JAMES: Let me just say to you, the very same Jesus that changed her life, she wasn't overlooked, she was loved, and she had to find that love. Would you receive that love right where you are?

Father, I want to receive it. I want you to work a miracle in my life. I not only want to receive your love I want to release it. Just tell him that. And you give him the clay and he'll shape you

into a vessel of great honor.

You, the viewer, please listen to me, you are the most amazing people. Now don't miss this. You're going to meet one of our friends that marched with us into the pit of hell, got hepatitis C holding little orphans in the broken-down Soviet Union that had collapsed; taking precious children she got a disease that nearly killed her. It has damaged her body. But Kirie's never stopped. She keeps marching right back into the mission field, she and her husband just love people. I want you to listen to her as she just keeps going back to put God's arms around people. And she's got what, ten grandchildren?

BETTY: I think so, nine or ten.

JAMES: Ten grandchildren, and she is a precious, precious wife and mother. Listen to her. Here's what I want you to know. When you watch and hear what you're going to hear, you become a kind of miracle that Maria experienced. You're going to become the most powerful force of transforming love the world can see. You get to be the miracle expression of God's love. Listen to Kirie.

On the mission field:

KIRIE: This is my first experience in ever hearing real-life stories from innocent children who have been sold into the sex trafficking industry. This is really hard. It's very hard.

Each of the girls that we visited with, they've all been tricked: some by friends; some by complete strangers; and the most unthinkable, some by their own parents, their mothers and fathers. They've all been sold by someone into the sex trafficking business.

Their lives have been torn apart. Their lives have been crushed. They're abused; they're lied to; they're made to feel like their lives are worth nothing. Once they've been sold into that, they're locked away into little bitty rooms, sometimes for years. Someone is watching them all the time. They're beaten every day. They live in constant fear. They don't know anything other than the

lifestyle that they've been entrapped in for years. So they stay captive to the chains that were put on them in those locked rooms. So those remain on them, even though they may not have them physically on them, they're still chained to their past.

That's what we want to do: we want to break those chains from their past. We want to show them that they can walk out of bondage. It isn't easy, but it can be done. We want to extend hope to them, but we cannot do it alone. We need your help.

End of video

In the studio:

JAMES: Kirie and Jimmy have been as faithful of supporters of the outreaches of *LIFE* as any we know. Betty, when you see these precious children and you heard Maria talk about her tragic situation, these children are taken captive and sold, and then they grow up in that bondage; and only love can set them free, but it does set them free. And our viewers are the ones that make that possible.

BETTY: You really do. I know Kirie personally; it was not easy for her to go over there and to see and to interact with those precious young ladies, those children--they're children! And to feel their heartache. So she brings that back to you knowing that you're going to reach out and join with us and make a difference in the lives of these precious children. You're going to get them out of those situations. You're going to give them a safe place to go and to be nurtured, and for their lives to be restored again. So join with us, won't you please?

JAMES: What we're able to do is reach, rescue and restore those who are caught in sexual trafficking; and they are prisoners. They're precious. They want to be free.

The average cost to reach, rescue, and begin the restoration process for each one is \$128. Now let me tell you what's happened. People like you, people like Jimmy and Kirie, they said we so believe in this we will put up together, a group of us, matching funds. And they have put up \$320,000 to match what you give. \$128, could you help rescue one? You say, yes, I can do that.

It may be a sacrifice, but I can do it. It will be doubled immediately. So not one rescued but two. Maybe you say, I couldn't do \$128. Could you do \$64? It will then become \$128.

Many people say I've been blessed. I can rescue ten with a gift of \$1280. Well, now you'll be rescuing 20. Would you go get your bankcard? Go online or call that number and say here's the gift God's leading me to give. You're actually giving the greatest gift, life and the love of God.

Would you please do it? If you make a check make it out to *LIFE*. Call us and tell us you're mailing it. Please respond as God directs right now. Would you please? You're going to give someone freedom. You're going to give them life.

Begin video clip:

Announcer: Human trafficking is one of the world's darkest sources of criminal activity and money. As a result, children and young people are being abducted and sold at the hands of violent predators into a never-ending nightmare.

Through Mission: Rescue Life you can reach out to warn children who are at the risk of being trafficked, rescue those already enslaved and restore young lives giving them a future. With a generous \$320,000 matching gift now your gift of \$128 to help 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 today, we'll send you *Natural Remedies*. This beautifully illustrated and essential book explores ancient nutrition and the health benefits found in God's creation. A valuable reference with biblical insight to help you live your best life.

With your gift of \$128 or more, you'll receive the *Jesus My Refuge* journal and pen set filled with scriptures reminding you of God's covering in times of need. You'll also be reminded to pray for those seeking refuge from the horrors of human trafficking.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280, which will now help rescue 20 children! And you may request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio:

JAMES: Betty, somehow, I just feel like every person who can give will. And know that your gift is doubled. *Natural Remedies*, I'm telling you what, Jordan Rubin and these others are a gift. Betty, you and I both have been blessed by nature's God in *Natural Remedies*. And then this is a fabulous, and boy do we need Jesus as our refuge, a fabulous journal; a beautiful pen we send you. The "Divine Servant" bronze is here for those of you who could put God's arms around ten and rescue them; it will now be 20.

Maria, we love you. We know that it moved *From Your Head to Your Heart* and you've been spreading that. And I know you're going to continue, you and your husband. Just know we love you. Thank God for you. I hope you're glad you came.

MARIA: Oh, I'm so glad I came.

JAMES: The guy you used to listen to preach in those crusades a lot.

MARIA: This is such a treat. This is such an honor. You guys are the real deal! I thank the Lord for everything you're doing.

JAMES: Well, all of those beautiful viewers make it possible. We love you. Thanks for watching *LIFE Today*. And as I say so many times, thanks for sharing life today and every day. God bless you!