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Week 45: Rescue LIFE, last week

James and Betty Robison

Jodie and Billy Ballenger

JAMES: I want to welcome you to *LIFE Today*. Betty and I feel like -- and I'm James -- we feel like we're welcoming the most wonderful people on the planet because you care. You care about what God cares about. And you want to share that care, that love; I want to thank you for that. Because you're a tremendous encouragement to us as we literally been around the world to put God's arms around the world.

But you make it possible, and you make it possible for us to set people free from sexual trafficking, feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty. And you do it with "a joy unspeakable full of glory." That's the way Paul put it. And we want to thank you. Thank you for the way you're praying for everyone that's suffering; and praying for God to adjust the direction of our nation, the United States, and other nations; and to heal our land by healing our hearts and minds.

Here is a story of healing, *Beautifully UnBroken*: "The Prostitute's Daughter." This is a couple, Jodie and Billy Ballenger; their life is a miracle and continues to be and produces miracles. I want to welcome you, Jodie, and you, Billy, to *LIFE Today*. And this story, I want us to share it. I'm going to ask you, Jodie, what you talked about in the book that you wrote, *Beautifully Unbroken*, meaning not destroyed, and you were "A prostitute's daughter." Touch on your journey.

JODIE: Yes. Well, my mom had a really rough childhood. Her stepdad abused her. She went to her mother. Her mother did not believe her. So she got out of the house as soon as she could, which set her up for even more pain. She got married young, had two children. Her husband basically abandoned them. So she sent --

JAMES: Were you one of those two children?

JODIE: No. She kind of had two sets of children. So then she sent my brother and my sister back to their grandparents, and that's when she went into a life of prostitution. She was just so hurt, so broken. Women that do that don't grow up and go I want to do this. They have been set up and just kicked down so many times.

Then that happened, and eventually, she got out of that. Her and my dad met and had another set of children; there's nine years difference. So completely different. When I was nine years old, my mom left my dad. She moved us into her sister's house in Cleveland, Ohio. When we got there, her sister and her husband were major drug dealers. So within a week of me being there, I'm nine years old, third grade, I start smoking pot, popping pills. By 11, I'm fighting anyone that will fight me. I go into juvenile for the first time at 11. I'm in and out of juvenile, in and out of the children's home. By 14 years old, I'm on meth.

I wanted structure, and I had none. I was able to do anything I wanted, whenever I wanted, sexually promiscuous. It was just -- and people look at that, especially friends, I'm 13-14, can do whatever I want, and everyone's going wow! That's such --

BETTY: You're lucky!

JODIE: Yes! And I'm thinking no. No, it's not. I just want to be loved -- I just want to be loved. My mom didn't know how to give it. She'd never had it, so she really didn't know how to give it. And so, at 14 years old, I am sent to a reform school, and it was a faith-based reform school. I walk in, and I feel the love. That it was like something you could feel, and I had just not had love for so long. And just going from place to place saying, love me! Love me! So when I got there, there was so much love, and they wanted to know about me.

Bible studies and I'm going, oh wow! So here, since I was nine, I'm living this crazy life. And all of a sudden, I'm surrounded by people that really love me and really want the best for me. And

then, about eight months (I was there for 14 months,) about eight months, I meet this guy in choir at the reform school.

JAMES: All right, tell us, were you the guy that was being the inspiration, or were you one of the guys that got inspired? Or both?

BILLY: Well, my situation was, the way I ended up in White's, it's called White's Residential and Family Services. It is a wonderful place in Wabash, Indiana; been around for about 165 years, helping kids, so many backgrounds. And we end up there. Of course, I'm in trouble in my county. I was adopted real young. My biological parents struggled and so gave me up for adoption, struggling to get their life together at that time. My aunt and uncle adopted me, thank God. Had my own struggles as a young boy trying to fit in, trying to find community. Big personality but just couldn't seem to make it somewhere, and sort of running away.

My adopted parents got a divorce. I wasn't getting along with the stepparents, so I was running from family to family and going from city to city, getting to a new school, and just struggling every time. They sent me to this juvenile home. Of course, I'm there eight months and joined the choir and met Jodie. What a gift. There were so many gifts I got going to that place. But just my life has really been blessed since meeting Jodie.

However, we continued to make a lot of bad decisions at that time. Now she is wanting out of that life at that moment. I'm actually meeting her and hearing about her lifestyle and thinking, mine was a little more structured than that, but I'm thinking, I'm interested. I want to live that kind of life. It sounds crazy.

So when we got released from there, I ran away from home to be with her. Now her mom lets me move right in. I show up at the house, and I get to move in right away. So naturally, Jodie ends up pregnant. We got married at 17 and 18, and I've now become, because of all the bullying that I experienced as a young kid, something snapped on the inside when I'm 17 years old, living with her and around her friends who are very violent, doing whatever, something snapped on the inside of me, and I just started becoming very violent -- wasn't raised like that. I was the kid

running home from school from all the kids chasing me home. I didn't want to be violent. And I just, her friends accepted me; that crowd accepted me. And James, it really fed my ego. It did something I never had before; I found community but in all the wrong ways. Heard a lot of songs written about that, right? So that's what happened to me.

And I dove in, and that became my reputation in that town as somebody that was crazy. I ate it up. Our house became the party house. We had our little baby girl there. I loved Jodie; she loved me, but just no direction as young kids. We got us an apartment, and then another apartment, and barely making it. Our house becomes the party house. And our little girl is nine months old, and we had a flow of known felons in and out of the home constantly. We were 18-19 by then; 2:00 in the afternoon, on a Monday afternoon, a SWAT team raids our house fully dressed in black from head to toe, black ski mask, black 12-gauge pump shotguns.

Now remember, Jodie is wanting out of that life, and I'm digging us in deeper now because I'd never experienced it. People think I got the story. I say, look, I didn't get to be bad for very long. This is the girl that has just really been through it. But they raided our house that day and took our baby girl from us, and they should have because of the violent people that were around, and they put us in jail.

At that moment, I started returning to my roots. What I mean by "the roots" is when I was ten years old, I heard the gospel for the first time at a Baptist church. Somebody preached the gospel; they took us down to the fire station, set up a stage, set up some chairs, pulled the fire trucks out so all the little kids would be interested, preached the gospel. I said "yes" to Jesus. And in this moment of trouble, I returned to Jesus. When our daughter was in foster care, that's what Jodie started doing, and we both started doing this. In this process, we're like, we want to get her back, how do we get her back? The welfare department wasn't going to give her back because we were facing trial. We didn't know that. We started going to parenting classes, doing whatever we could.

JODIE: We did whatever they said to do. And they just were not going to give her back. I knew for me to get off the drugs, I needed to get out of those surroundings. Everyone I knew in that

town was on drugs. I didn't know anyone that wasn't. And so we so badly wanted to change that we said, okay, we would rather move away. We moved to Indianapolis, an hour away. We would rather be homeless and by ourselves and away from this than remain here. We were so determined to change.

And so I got a job at a gas station. Now we're awaiting trial. So trials are going to be happening within the next couple of months. So I get a job at a gas station, and they send Billy to a drug rehab. While he is at drug rehab, I get robbed at gunpoint twice. And so we had just, right before he went to drug rehab, gathered enough money to get a place to live. Well, I knew that I couldn't quit the job because I needed a place to live. We just got out of homelessness. I didn't want to go back.

And so Billy gets out of rehab, and he says if it happens one more time, you have to quit. Wouldn't you know, that night it happened -- it happened again. And so the next day, we went to the gas station to get one of my last checks, and while we were there, go ahead.

BILLY: Inside this gas station, of course, I just got out of rehab, just a real punk, rude to her and everything. She is waiting on the check, and I can remember saying to her, "I just got to go. We've got to leave. We'll come back and get your check. I've got to go find a job."

And there had been a gentleman that had just walked in a few minutes before that. He had been coming in and out of there. Later, we find out he is a construction worker. But he stopped in that day because his truck was overheating. This was the supernatural part about this. He comes in and says, "I need some water. My truck is overheating."

Jodie gets him some water. He comes back in. He goes, "I don't know what the deal is. The truck is fine." He said, "I don't know what's going on. It's fine now." He overhears me saying, "Jodie, let's go. I've got to go find a job. Let's just leave."

He goes, "You need a job? I'll hire you right now. What can you do?"

I said, "I can dig a hole."

[Laughter]

He said, "I'll hire you right now. Can you go to work tomorrow?"

I said, "Yeah."

And over the next 15-30 minutes, he began to ask us questions and talk to us inside the gas station, talking to her about the robbery where she'd been robbed three times now. And he told us about the job. And then he says this. He goes, "Easter is coming up. Do you guys go to church anywhere?" He said, "You guys going to church? I'd like to invite you to my church."

And of course, we're like, "Yeah! Yeah!" But I'm thinking the only reason I'm going to his church is because he just gave me a job.

[Laughter]

And then he says, he was bold enough to say this, "Can my wife and I, would you guys mind if my wife and I come to your house tonight? We'd love to talk to you guys and tell you about our church."

So, of course, we said yes because he gave me a job. So that's the whole thing I'm thinking the whole time.

They showed up at our house that night and started ministering to us. We went to church with them the next night after I got off work. We started going to church every single week with them. And every time we'd go into that church, we'd lean over and say --

JODIE: I was going to say, tell them about the church.

BILLY: Church was a little wild for us. But every time we'd go in there, we'd lean over to each other and say, "We're not coming back here. Job or no job, we're not coming back." So for us, it just felt like needles were sticking in our bodies all over. They're dancing, they're praising God, their music is loud. But I tell you what, after the third week I'm playing the tambourine. After the third week, the fourth week, we're responding to an altar call rededicating our lives to the Lord.

The night before we went to trial, now we never told anybody there but this couple --

JODIE: We didn't want to tell anyone because we didn't want them to feel, oh, the pastor was an Indianapolis sheriff. So when we found that out, we were thinking, he's going to assume we're coming to his church to get help. So we told no one except that one couple.

BILLY: This couple knew, and they would encourage us. And I would be on the job, and I'd say, "Hey, tell me about the tribulation. What's going to happen?" He would say things like, "I'm not going to let you be here." And things like that; just really taught us about the Lord and prayed with us. He knew the trial was coming up, and they were praying for favor over the trial. So we're there, and Jodie gets baptized the night before we go to trial.

JODIE: I was in. I was in!

BILLY: I raised my hand, but I didn't walk up to the altar call. When we went to trial, they found us guilty. Now during this time, the foster care had given my daughter to my mom. Thank God.

JODIE: So Mindy was in foster care for 30 days and then went to Billy's mother.

BILLY: And thank God she just did a wonderful job with her. But anyway, we're incarcerated now. And we just really start digging in the word and just asking God. Now I tell you, I wasn't going to God because I thought he was -- I knew God was holy; like everybody knows God is amazing, God's the creator. But that wasn't my goal. I wasn't going to him to worship him, and I have to tell people this all over the world; I went to God because I needed something. And he

never criticized me for that and what happened in my search for what I needed. People kept telling me, "Have faith! The mountain will be moved. You'll get your wife back, your daughter back, and have a family again." And I started digging in the word, and in this process, I fell in love with Jesus Christ. And he got us out. And he restored us.

We got out of prison on the same day when they finally released us. That was another miracle where the judge says, "You're not going to get out. You're going to do all your time." And we kept praying for her, Proverbs 21, verse one: The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. Like the rivers of water, he will turn it the way he wants it to go. I kept praying for that judge. I said, "God, if any man is in Christ as a new creature, they got an innocent man locked up. And this is not right." I had to be careful who I told that to. But I prayed that way.

And God changed that judge's heart, and we walked out of prison on the same day together, going to my mom's house. My daughter is now over three years old. We walked up to our daughter and tapped her on the shoulder. Her back was to us. She was at the kitchen table. She turned right around, picture-perfect, turned right around, pulled her hair back, and said, "Mommy!"

JODIE: Because during those two years, I was only able to see her between six to eight times in two years. Thank goodness Billy was at a prison that was closer and was able to see her more.

BILLY: In less than two months, we were granted full custody of our baby girl back with no strings attached. Jesus so changed us we never returned to that life again. We are still a close family, friends, with that couple that met; I just spoke at one of his men's meetings recently that met us at that gas station.

JODIE: And it was all because his car was overheating. But when he went -- [Laughing] that was God's plan.

JAMES: Do you go and give your testimony? So if somebody wanted you to come and share, what would be the email address where they could reach out to you or the website?

BILLY: They can just go to BillyBallenger.com or JodieBallenger.com.

JAMES: You may want them to come. Father, I just thank you for this beautiful couple, their great story of your grace. And how you offer it to everyone watching. Thank you for them, in Jesus' name.

Billy and Jodie, we just thank God for what he's doing in your life, not what he's just done, has done, but is doing. And for all of you, I want you to know this. You have an opportunity right now to be like that miracle couple that came into their lives, the guy at the service station. You have an opportunity to just show people the joy of the Lord, and the peace that he offers, and the life and the love that he offers. And you do it. Betty, our viewers, I believe, reveal Jesus' love to the unnoticed and the least of these as clearly as any people on the planet.

This is the last week of the emphasis we call Rescue LIFE, where we reach, we rescue, and we begin the restoration process of those who have been trafficked sexually. But all over the world, we have been setting these precious girls, and sometimes boys, free because of Rescue LIFE.

I want you to listen to some of these girls, and this last week, we've got an incredible matching gift that will match everything that you give right now and double it. Listen to these girls, and then you be the answer to their heart cry because you can be. You really can be the miracle they need. Watch closely.

On the mission field:

ANNOUNCER: Imagine all the dreams young children have for their future that never come true.

Open Captions: I used to have hope but not anymore.

ANNOUNCER: Young women are held captive and forced to smile or suffer the consequences.

Open Captions: I was forced to have sex with many men, or they said they would kill me.

ANNOUNCER: The life-destroying industry of human trafficking tears at the very soul of these precious girls.

Open Captions: I have no memories of being happy. I am broken inside.

ANNOUNCER: This is all done through lies and violence.

Open Captions: They took my passport and sold me to a brothel in another country. They made me sleep with many men, and if I did not, they would beat me and threatened to kill me.

ANNOUNCER: These young girls believe that no one loves them. However, we know that they are loved. And with your help, we can show them that they are loved. *LIFE Outreach* and our mission partners will not rest as long as there are young girls trapped in the sex slave trade waiting for someone to rescue them.

End of video

In the studio:

JAMES: I believe with all my heart that's exactly what you'll do. Betty, as I was looking at the faces of those precious girls, stole my passport, sold me into another country, and sex. God! God, please set captives free! Set those men free that use those girls and that traffic them and go to them. And God in heaven, please set us free. Set us free! In Jesus' name.

Those girls want to be free, and the rescue workers that work with all the outreach and Rescue LIFE, literally marched into hell and pain for a heavenly cause, for redemption's purpose.

I'm asking you right now, this last week, I'm asking you if you'd please go online or dial that number and take your bank card. Now you get that card, and I ask you, please use it like a check -- make a great check. If you write a check, make it to *LIFE* but call us and tell us you're putting it in the mail.

Know that what you give will be matched. We tell you that to start the process, reaching, rescuing, and restoring, it's \$128 on average. That's one. Would you do that? You say yes, now you've rescued two. \$64 will be doubled to rescue one. There is a level at which all of you could help. This last week is going to take everybody doing what you can to touch them with the love of God. Let them know they're not overlooked. They do not have to live in bondage all their life. They can be totally set free and begin to share the love of God just like you're doing when you reach out and touch them with that love.

Would you please go get your bank card, write a check, go online or call the number and tell us what you're sending or giving now? And it will be immediately matched. We have some beautiful gifts to send you. Sheila's book talks about a freedom that we all need; even when it really looks too tough to go on, but there is hope. What a gift she is to us, to the ministry, and the outreach. Thank you so much.

We have some other gifts to bless you as you're blessing others. Thank you so much for becoming the miracle someone desperately needs, becoming the answer to prayer. We all want our prayers answered. Many of you have joined Betty and me and our staff and the mission workers, becoming a miracle answer to someone's prayer. When you go right now and make that gift, that's what you're becoming. 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, forced into the evil industry of human trafficking.

Through Mission: Rescue *LIFE*, you can reach out to educate children at 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 Sheila Walsh's brand-new book, *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*; "A lifeline of hope for those who feel their life is falling apart."

With your gift of \$128 or more, you'll receive the *Beauty Out of Ashes* puzzle set featuring an image taken by our team while on a trip to the mission field. This 500-piece puzzle forms a beautiful portrait of hope in the midst of despair. Included is a 24-piece puzzle for your children and grandchildren.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280, which will now help rescue 20 children. And you may request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant." This is had the last week! Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio:

JAMES: You know, we've had some challenges in our life. Sheila and I both had pretty rough times when we were children. I'm the product of a rape, and the doctor just refused to abort me. Sheila's father committed suicide. She felt like it was her fault. Broken people, God put the broken pieces together. *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*: "Clinging to hope when life seems to be falling apart." It will be a blessing to you.

I want to say thanks to Jodie and Billy Ballenger. Jodie shared her *Beautifully UnBroken Story*:

"The prostitute's daughter." You can get that book online if you say, James, you know what? I think I'd like to read that. Well, you help us set people free, we'll be glad to send it to you to say thank you, along with Sheila's and the other gifts we've mentioned for your support. Thank you so much.

Betty and I love you. We pray for you. Billy, love you, man.

BILLY: Love you, brother.

JAMES: And love you so much, Jodie. Bless y'all! Thank you for being a blessing. You really are, and we appreciate it.