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Week 45: Rescue LIFE, last week

James and Betty Robison

Max Lucado

In the studio

JAMES: Well, Betty and I welcome you to *Life Today*. I'm James Robison and this is Betty. We've got a guest. He's pretty well known, Max Lucado. You know, I just told him my wife's sister is married to the hardline Church of Christ and they didn't know for sure if we were saved. I think maybe 20, 30, 40 years before they decided we were. Margie, Jerry, we love you!

But this gentleman had a very great Church of Christ, he started writing me nice notes telling me that he really loved me and appreciated something I'd said or something I'd written. And I thought, isn't this refreshing? I mean I've got a Church of Christ guy that acts like he thinks I'm going to heaven and he didn't baptize me.

And we became very good friends and we are. Max has been here a lot. You know that. He's a great writer. He is gifted in ways far beyond ways I'm gifted in. He might think I'm gifted in some ways. He may say I don't think I'm gifted in those. Well, we're not all supposed to be gifted the same. But he's a gift from God. And what a writer. He's been called "America's Pastor" by a lot of people.

Now get this, *God Never Gives Up on You*. And he talks about Jacob and what Jacob's story teaches is about failure. And I've been telling people that God uses imperfect people to accomplish his perfect will. No perfect person has ever run for office. Jesus is not running and that's the only perfect. And the Bible is written by imperfect people. Think

about that. There they are.

But here's the deal. This is what got my attention here. He doesn't just talk about Jacob and boy, he made a mess, and yet he's in the word and he was a man God used. But Max Lucado talks about his challenges and defeat. Imagine that! A preacher admitting? Well, he does.

Max, I'm glad to have you back on *Life Today*.

MAX: It's great to see you. And Betty, it's such a treat. You both look simply wonderful! Simply wonderful!

JAMES: Well, you said you've been married just over 40 years. It's hard to believe people have been married 60 years but we have.

MAX: That's amazing! That's amazing.

JAMES: It's been a glorious journey. And we've had mainly my pitfalls and downfalls, and Betty in her love picking me up.

Let's talk about Jacob a little bit. Why did you pick him out when all the writers of the Bible failed in some way? You've got to wonder why Solomon is still in the Bible.

MAX: We would have edited him out, wouldn't we have? We would have edited out the story of David and Bathsheba. If the adultery wasn't bad enough, how about the murder?

JAMES: And he was the guy that had such perfect love. I mean to know how to love sheep and how to be a champion against the enemy of God and the people. And then he made a mess.

MAX: And then you've got the preacher of Pentecost cussing that he even knew Jesus

just a few days before.

JAMES: After bragging about how he was the one person you could always depend on.

MAX: It's crazy.

JAMES: How does he get to be a leader in the New Testament after he did all that?

MAX: You know, right now in the New Jerusalem that's being constructed, you will look, and around the foundation are the names of the sons of the children of Jacob—the sons of Jacob, the 12 tribes of Jacob. And then you start looking at what those guys did. It's crazy.

When you hear Jesus talk about the patriarchs he still says, "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." I would have just stuck with Abraham and Isaac. That's enough. But not only did he include Jacob but he gave Jacob the name Israel.

So if that's all a person knew about Jacob they would think, okay, he is divine, he is holy, he never messed up. But then you begin reading the story of Jacob and it is just one mishap after another after another after another.

JAMES: And they appear to be very deliberate.

MAX: They do, don't they? I think he was—it's just a context, just in case somebody is not remembering Jacob. He is the grandson of Abraham. He is the second son of Isaac, although he wanted to be the first son, but the second by just a second. Right? Betty, came out of the womb holding on to his brother's heel. Which is really a triumph of irony because he was always trying to pull his brother back. And then not too long later, he and his mother conspire to get the birthright from Esau by selling—Esau doesn't deserve a lot of credit either. He sells his birthright. Then they lie to the father. The whole family is in such a mess that Rebekah says hightail it out of here because Esau has got that look in his

eyes, he's got a dagger in his hand, and he's going to kill you. So that's how the story starts. And to be quite honest it doesn't get a lot better. [Laughing]

You know, I love Jacob. And I want to hear what y'all think but I think I love Jacob because he reminds us so much of me. He's just always struggling to keep from stumbling. He moves forward but then he moves back. He has this beautiful blessing on his life, but he doesn't quite know what to do with it. And in spite of it all, God is there. God shows up. God appears to him in visions. God wrestles with him in the mud of Jabbok. God affirms the covenant he made to Abraham. God's name just keeps showing up, just keeps showing up and I can relate.

JAMES: But God is love. And his love is boundless, it is unconditional, and you know, because I realize that I have missed the mark, I have as Jacob failed. And like all the others we want to refer to, I failed. And the enemy is the accuser of the brethren. And when you find yourself having to agree that the accuser is obviously right about some things, it is very easy to live in shame.

But do you know what the Lord showed me that that father of that prodigal, that just didn't do a whole lot right? He took everything that the father gave him and blessed him with. And he went off and he wasted it in riotous living. He shamed the family, shamed the father's name, wasted everything, ends up in a pigpen, which is not where Jewish boys were going to end up. Here is what I saw, a father who looked every day for him to come back. And when I looked at that story, I could see that father leaving the porch, walking to the first curve, probably ultimately to the next curve in the road. I even think, and this is what I just believe with all my heart, I believe the father saw that boy in that pigpen. And the father loved that boy as much when he was in that pen as he lived at home. Does that sound like the Father's love?

MAX: It does!

JAMES: That's the love he has for all of us. That's the love he has for Jacob. It is the

love he has for me and you. But I failed. I let my schedule almost ruin my life. I lost intimacy with God. I became vulnerable. My thoughts were not right. Forty years ago, I began to confess my failure. Now here you are, one of the most respected preachers on the planet, and you tell us you had a problem. Do you mind telling our audience that you're sharing this that Max Lucado, a great pastor of a great church and a great writer of many books, how in the world did you mess up?

MAX: I love sharing my story because I tried—I tried the path of perfection and that is a weighty path, that is an uphill path. The path of honesty, and disclosure, that gives God the glory and takes the weight off of me.

JAMES: That's the pathway to repentance, isn't it?

MAX: It is!

JAMES: So what happened? Where did you feel like you messed up?

MAX: So yeah, back up, if we can. I'm 68. I know I look like I'm 88 but I'm 68.

JAMES: You look great!

MAX: When I was in my late 40s, our church was still doing great, by the way, but we moved on to some new property. We suddenly had a new space. We had a new sanctuary and it was packed every week—packed! Not only that, Christianity Today sent a reporter to San Antonio to do a profile on me and they entitled it, "America's Pastor."

JAMES: Yeah! There you are. That's it!

MAX: Whoa! Hello! Hello!

JAMES: We can't believe we got you here.

MAX: The church loved me, we didn't have any debt. They did not doubt that I was the greatest guy. I began to think I was, too. Meanwhile, our staff—great staff but man, there was some animosity, competition for budget dollars, church dollars, you know. Everybody needing new staff. And I was not a good pastor. Well, I was busy. I had speaking engagements, had books to write. I had this, that, or the other to do.

So I felt the stress of a growing church, and the expectations, and so I did what came naturally. I began to drink. I would go over to a—this is so crazy. Even as I tell it now, but I would go to a convenience store on the other side of town so nobody would see me. I'd buy one of those big cans of beer in a brown paper bag. I'd put it by my thigh so nobody would see me walking out with it. Paid for it. Didn't steal it; that would have been even worse. But I'd pay for it and I'd go and sit out in the car and I would drink and just use the phrase, "I'd take the edge off. Just take the edge off."

JAMES: Trying to escape the pressure, the load.

MAX: Yeah. By then I'd preached for 30 years. I knew I'd preached a dozen sermons on managing stress: Pray, talk to people, read the Bible, acknowledge your struggle. I wasn't doing anything I told people to do. [Laughing]

I tell this story in the book because it reminds me of when Jacob wrestled with God in the mud of Jabbok. Because I was wrestling with God. I was telling God, I've got it all together. I've got it all together. And on one of those occasions, and I think this lasted for a month, maybe, six weeks.

But on one of those occasions, I felt the Lord talk to me. And he said, "If you've got it all together, why in the world are you hiding in your car in a convenience store drinking beer?" And it just, it, it—it was a good come-to-Jesus moment. It was a good come-to-Jesus moment. Went back, and I don't know if that day was the day of the elders' meeting, if not, it was that week.

And I just told them, I said, "I'm crumbling under the stress. I've been managing it wrong." I told them what I was doing. They prayed for me. They made some changes. Oh, they were the best.

JAMES: Aren't you grateful for them? Do you know the greatest shamers sometimes, joining the shamer, are people in church? They load it up. That's heartbreaking because it is so unChristlike. So ungodlike. It would have been tough had they added shame.

MAX: I remember one of them in particular, Jim Potts. He is in heaven now. And he said, "Max, what you're doing is wrong. But who you are is God's. What you're doing is wrong, but you still belong to God." And that's what I needed to hear. They didn't need to cover it up and say, "Oh no, no. You're fine, you're fine!" No, he needed to tell me to get your act—it is what Jesus told the woman caught in an act of adultery, "Your sins are forgiven, sin no more." Get your act together. Let's see if we can pull ourselves up by God's grace and move forward. And they did.

BETTY: That's when we really, I feel like we come to those moments in our interaction with God is when we feel the most unloving, unkind, unlovely person, he's right there to pick us up. He said you can come back to me if you will. I'm right here. I never left you. I'll never forsake you. But I'll always be here for you. And sometimes that's kind of hard because we allow pride to come in, we allow everything else to separate, we feel like separates—fear comes in.

MAX: Shame.

BETTY: All of it. But he says, I'm right here, just come to me.

MAX: Never will I leave you.

JAMES: So many of our church people are distracted and defeated. So many pastors are

attracted the wrong way and defeated. I can't help but wonder in a day when so many people in church, with all of the distractions that have taken many of them captive, for you to be willing to admit that we all as believers can be held captive, can be pulled down. And God wants to break the yoke and we need to encourage that.

I can't help but believe you're writing this at a time when the church is experiencing tremendous defeat in the pastorate, so many pastors are resigning, and so many people right now are coming back from the military depressed and suicidal. They're just a tremendous weight on people. I feel like you're saying, no matter where you've been, what you're going through, what you've done, there is such hope for you. And that hope can be poured out through the church. But God is offering it to everybody.

Do you think you were led to write this right now because there is so much of the church living in defeat and maybe tending to give up and not recognize how much God loves them? Do you think the timing could be very critically important right now?

MAX: I think the statistics are just overwhelming: 135 people a day orchestrated their own deaths during 2022. The fourth most popular website in America is porn hub. Fourth—right after Google and YouTube. The porn hub! Some billion hits a day. What's happening in our world? I think people are treating their pain inappropriately. That's what I was doing. The problem is not the presence of pain, the problem is the mistreatment of it. We all are tempted to mistreat our pain by, like you say, distractions, either by what we eat or what we smoke or how many hours we work. We're trying to escape. Don't be ashamed of having pain. Be careful how you treat it.

I think Jacob was—he was trying to solve his problems without involving God and ended up trying to trick people, deceive people, and then he ended up being tricked and deceived. It's an amazing story. But in the end, God was still faithful to Jacob. Kept his covenant and gave him a new name.

JAMES: I want us to pray together right now for our viewers. Father, so many right now

are ashamed and they're being shamed. And you want to break the shame. You took the blame, you took the sin, and Lord, let them see that. And help them admit, I've got a problem. Lord, the enemy today is saying there is no problem. There is no God. There is no right and wrong. Lord, once we decide what you say is right nothing's right. We can't think straight. That's what you teach us in Romans 1. Once we change your word into a lie, we can't even think straight and we begin to embrace insanity and protect it. God, have mercy on us! And help people to admit we all need forgiveness, in Jesus' name.

Max, do you want to say something to our viewers about what God wants them to hear wherever they are?

MAX: Yeah, I would say the greatest news in the Bible is not just that God made the world but that God loves the world. He does. He loves you. And the picture of his plan for you is found in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were created to be in harmony with God with no shame, walking with God in a perfect paradise.

I believe that that plan has not changed. That God will have his garden, he will have his family, and he invites you to say yes to him and be a part of that. So I would urge you to say yes to his plan for your life, to say yes to it. Let me tell you, friend, this is a fast life. James and Betty, they look wonderful, they've been around for 80 years. And it went like that, didn't it? Went just like that. My life is going like that. It is a vapor, it is going to be gone. The purpose of this life is to make a decision about where we spend eternal life, and to say yes to him. Say yes to him.

JAMES: And you see a phone number there that's paid for by love. If you want to make a call and say, pray with me. I want to turn my life over to the God that loves me enough that he gave his son to take my sins and my failures and give me life now and for all eternity.

By the way, eternal life starts now when you receive him. Do you want someone to pray with you? You call.

Max, we're going to offer this book to everyone that will do one thing we ask them to do. We're going to show you some tremendous needs of children that are being trafficked. They're being sexually damaged and love will set them free. And we're able to share that love together. I want you to ask God, can I become somebody's miracle today? And the answer is yes! I want you to watch closely and prayerfully.

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: These are the faces of those who once were. Once were happy. Once were safe... loved... cared for. Now they are vanishing at the hands of predators... abducted... misled. To distant cities they are taken. In foreign lands they are held captive. Their childlike innocence is erased, freedom forgotten; their spirit and will broken under abuse -- under torture.

Open captions

>> If the girls won't sleep with our clients, we beat them with a bat or electrocute them until they obey.

ANNOUNCER: Not only do these girls vanish, all that they were disappears too. Nowhere is there a darker evil than that perpetrated so viciously on the victims of sex trafficking. It may be the greatest evidence of Satan at work on this earth and it isn't going away without a fight.

Our Rescue Life partners are in place and ready to reach those who are most vulnerable, rescue those who have already been taken and restore the precious lives of those who have survived the wickedness of human trafficking.

End of video

In the studio

JAMES: Betty and I have been all over the world and we have seen that. And the love of

viewers, Betty, built the most amazing Destiny House in the sex capital of the world, in Asia, through the Middle East rescuing children.

Betty, we know we have been able to set free millions of children—millions of people who have been trapped because our viewers have helped us. We've seen the pain but we've seen the miracle of God's love through our viewers. Aren't you amazed at what love does through the people who watch this program?

BETTY: I really am. Thank you so much for continuing to support what we feel like God has called us to do. And it's you too. This ministry is yours because you participate in it. But if only one child was reached, only one child was saved, wouldn't it be worth it all? I think it is. Because Jesus reached down to each one of us at the time when we needed him and asked for him to come into our hearts. He said yes, by all means.

These children are ready to be rescued. Let's help them. Let's give them hope. Please continue to join with us.

JAMES: And we make it very clear that it costs an average, now think about this, of \$128 to rescue one child. That means to reach them, rescue them, and start the restoration process, which includes sometimes renting facilities but then building facilities like Destiny House, and so many others in so many different countries. And it works.

Love never fails. And love is expressed through a channel that's been shaped by the Potter's hands to become a channel through which he flows his love. You're that channel. You're the answer to prayer. You're the miracle that someone longs for. \$128 will rescue one. We have got a group of people like you. We didn't know if people would help us do this. They didn't want to hear about sex and sexuality. But you, the viewers said, we want to do that!

And we've got a group that makes a commitment of \$320,000 to match what you give. So think about it. You make a gift of \$128, you don't just rescue one, you rescue two. You

make a gift of \$1280, you don't just rescue ten, you rescue 20. Everything is doubled because of God's love through someone like you. Would you help? Could you make a \$1280 gift? Could you make a \$128 gift knowing it will be doubled?

Father, please help everyone who can give all they can to give life, to set these precious young people and these girls, and yes, too often boys, set them totally free, in Jesus' name.

Would you go get your bank card? Use it like a check, that's how you should always use it. Dial the number on the screen and say here's my gift. I know it will be doubled. I'm giving life. You can go online and make that gift right now. Many people choose to do that. But remember, this is the last week and we're asking you please, please help us! We need to hear from every one of you, whatever size gift you can make. We're going to be sending gifts to you that will bless you and encourage you, I promise.

Thank you for going to the phone. Thank you for going online. Thank you for making a gift of life and freedom!

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 warn children who are at risk for sex trafficking, rescue those already enslaved, and restore young lives and give 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 "Declare." This beautifully designed 31-day devotional reveals 31 names of God from scripture and gives insight into the character, grace, and the depth of God's love for you.

With your gift of \$128 or more, you'll receive The Gospels book set. This special edition collection of the four gospels in the classic King James version includes journaling space opposite each page of scripture so you can reflect as you read. The perfect companion for your daily time with God.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280 which will now help save 20 children. And you may request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Consider the Birds."

This is the last week! Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio

JAMES: This is the names of God. And Max Lucado here, he knows how powerful those are. And then *The Gospels*, where you've got the gospels, and places for notes when you read the chapters. But how about this book? *God Never Gives Up on You*. Sometimes you think he does, he doesn't. You help us put God's arms of love around these that have been trafficked and show them freedom, and if you want this, we'll send it to you just to say thanks.

Max, you're always a blessing. I hope this Baptist and this Church of Christ guy stay as close as God wants the whole family to stay. I know that's our prayer. You've been a joy to know all these years, my friend.

MAX: Thank you. I love you too.

JAMES: Thank you so much. Thanks for helping share his love. You are amazing!