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Week 12: Rescue LIFE

James and Betty Robison

Kechi Okwuchi

JAMES: Well, I will soon be preaching 60 years, and Betty and I married 60 years so we'll be talking about that. But I've been coming into your home for 55 years and I want you to know it is a blessing. James Robison, my wife, Betty; and we've been walking around the world putting God's arms around people that are overlooked, the least of these most of the time, and you have made it happen, those of you who watch this show.

But we have walked all over Africa for more than 30 years. And we have a guest who has just written a book, *More Than My Scars*. Kechi was a finalist in *America's Got Talent* a few years ago. Simon Cowell wrote the forward to this book, that in itself is a miracle.

Here's the thing. She was in a horrible plane crash in Nigeria; over 100 people were on board, and two people lived. She was 16. Now she didn't know why; when all the others died, why is she alive? And how does she deal with the questions in her mind and how does she deal with the scars when she is burned, second and third-degree burns, not on her face but much of her body?

Kechi Okechi. I'm going to ask her to say it even better than I did. Kechi, you are a beautiful person. I know there were times probably you didn't feel that way. But say your last name. I didn't say it exactly right.

KECHI: You did good. It was Okwuchi.

JAMES: Did I do okay on Kechi?

KECHI: You did very good. Perfect!

JAMES: Okay. You were just a teenager, and you were really puzzled why only two people lived. Okay, tell me how you dealt with that. Tell me the challenges that came because you have written a powerful story. It's a healing story for others which is why Simon wrote the forward.

KECHI: Honestly, it was definitely a journey in and of itself to not just go through the healing process of the accident physically, but to kind of try to understand the whys, hows, and where I was supposed to go from there, from something so huge and life-changing. And definitely, the most important thing for me was navigating my faith, which at the time was still very much a baby. It was growing and getting nurtured by my family.

And then to find out about four months into my treatment that everyone I knew on that plane was gone permanently, and not just died, but all other passengers were gone except one more person. So, essentially, two people survive this ordeal. That was shattering for me. Because up until that point, I assumed if I was alive that everyone else was alive. I felt like it might not be as bad if one person survives because who survives a plane crash in the first place?

So when I realized the gravity of this miracle, really, of this tragedy, I felt so depressed because of all of the lives that were lost but also very confused because at that point I was learning that this God is a good God. He's great, he's amazing, he's powerful, and so I just couldn't understand how he would just allow 60 kids to go—in just one go. I just couldn't understand that.

And it was a struggle for me to kind of shift my perspective on God because up until that point, I want to say I had seen him like this stern father figure, and then I was learning about him to be a person who answered prayers, a being who answered prayers. So it was almost transactional really in how I saw him. But then, now I was being faced with the

fact that it is not always—you don't always get the results you want just because you believe in him. So that was a hard thing to swallow for sure. It was very difficult to swallow that.

But my mom, my family for real, but like the whole family but specifically my mom, she was used throughout this process by the Holy Spirit because of the things that she said to me that I will never forget until today. Those things define that shift in perspective that I have when it comes to God.

JAMES: Share a couple of those thoughts that she shared with you.

KECHI: So the main thing I struggled with was understanding who God was, just point-blank period. Trying to understand that he's not a vending machine where you ask for something and then you get something back from him immediately. That's not what that relationship is supposed to be. And I couldn't understand how someone so good could allow something so horrible to happen.

And I also didn't understand how Christians were going through difficult things because I thought the whole point of being faithful and being a believer was that it shielded you in this world. And my mom told me that being a Christian does not mean that you'll cease to experience negative and difficult things; that's not how it works. You still live in this world that is flawed. You will experience hurt, and bad things happen to good and bad people. Just as good things happen to good and bad people, and we don't understand why that's just how the world works.

But what being a Christian does, how it sets you apart, is that when those bad things happen—for example: a plane crash, or maybe something not as huge—when they happen, they give you—like he gives you a place to go to when those bad things happen. So he's more like a place of refuge, he's a place of peace, and a place of comfort. So he is who you turn to when difficult things happen in life.

So the difference there would be a non-believer might encounter difficult things and feel hopeless, like it is a dead end. But being a believer lets you know that it's never hopeless. As long as you have breath in you, it's not the end when those bad things happen. There is a place where you can go that will give you comfort and love, and most times reinvigorate you to go back out there and keep facing those challenges.

So I think that was the most important perspective change for me in terms of faith. I started to see God more as a loving father who wanted the best for us even though sometimes the world will not give us the best. I think that that was so important for me to realize that because it helped me understand that he was a place to also draw strength from. I was trying to make sense of this horrible thing that happened, and I just could not. I feel like he was the place I went to for comfort even though things didn't make any sense.

And more importantly, he gave me a purpose in my survival to use my life as a way to kind of show those who passed away that I appreciate the second chance by living for them, and not just going through the motions now. Now I had even more of a desperate need to live my life on behalf of those who passed away, especially my friends. I think that was something I could only have—that's the thought process I could only have accessed after I saw God for who he really was, which was a father who cares.

JAMES: You went to the burn center in Johannesburg for quite a while, and then I guess back to your home. But then you ended up in the burn center in Shriners in Houston, and now then Houston is your home.

So the healing process continued physically and spiritually. When people get the book, which I'm praying they will, *More Than My Scars*, what do you want them to hear? And how did you get into the music and so forth? What is it that when you saw what had happened, for instance, the scars, how did you handle this, and then how did you get into music?

KECHI: So when it comes to the scars, this was something that I was very aware I needed to decide on, I guess, the importance it's going to have in my life before I left the hospital. I had to decide for myself what priorities to place on my physical scars and my appearance, because if I got out into the world after leaving the hospital without being prepared, the world will decide for me how to feel about myself, how to feel about my scars, and I couldn't let that happen.

So I simply—at the time when I asked my mom to show me my reflection, said, "Give me a mirror," my intention was to see myself, react however I was going to react, and if I needed some kind of therapy, to get going as soon as possible so that I could be okay. Because at that point, this is about four months in, I knew I was bandaged head to toe, my head, everywhere but I had not seen my face. But I knew based on what I'd seen that it would not be what I'd expect.

So I was nervous about that. I was nervous about how it would change my personality and if it would affect how I felt about myself. A lot of the confidence I felt up until that point came from my physical appearance. At 16, I was a very pretty teenager, very aware of it and God gave me a lot of confidence. So now that I knew it might be different, I was worried about how that would change me. It was a very nerve-racking moment for myself and my mom and my dad.

So the next day she brought the mirror and she tried to prepare me which just made me more nervous because she was like—we're still doing surgery, everything is going to be okay. So I was like cool, cool. And then she showed me my reflection. And I remember the moment I looked into that mirror—everything was very different from how it is now. Everything was very pink and raw. There was no skin on my face. It was just very different from the last time I saw myself. And I remember just kind of being taken aback like oh, wow! That is extremely different.

But I think what struck me the most in that moment was that even though I physically did not look like Kechi, there was still something very familiar that was reflecting back to

me. So this person didn't look like the Kechi that I knew from memory, but she still felt the essence of it, I just knew it was me, even though it didn't look like me. It might have been maybe in my eyes or something in there that just hadn't changed.

That was the moment that I realized that if I can still feel like me even if I don't look like me anymore, then whatever makes me who I am has to go much deeper than what we can see on the surface. And I think that that was probably the second most important realization I had while in South Africa. The fact that my scars did not seem to change the essence of who I was, was what gave birth to what has become my life mantra, which is that my scars do not define me.

And that's what gave birth to the name of the book *More Than My Scars* because it was clear that this was only a surface thing, and the essence of who we are as people goes way beyond what people can see. That's why we say "Don't judge a book by its cover" because you can look great and be horrible and vice versa.

So I think understanding that was probably the most important thing for me in terms of identity because then if couldn't—if I can feel this way about my scars then no one can make me feel any type of way about them. Feeling that way about my scars gave me a lot of freedom as well because I didn't have to dress differently. I didn't have to behave in a different way or stop having the same sense of humor. All those things I liked about myself didn't have to change just because I look different on the outside.

More importantly, the support system I had around me, my family reinforced that feeling for me. They didn't focus on my appearance, they just wanted me to be better and that validated what I felt about my identity being the least important thing here. So that also gave me confidence that I was approaching this in the right way.

So after my faith grew, I kind of learned that—as I was learning about God and learning about how much he loved us, I was able to kind of see that he was probably the best place to place my identity in because he will never change how he sees us. If he loves us, he

loves us. It doesn't have anything to do with how we look. From when we're children down to when we're old. It doesn't matter.

So that's probably a very safe place to see—it's probably safest to see myself through his eyes because then nothing anyone in the world says, including loved ones, would matter because his opinion would never change about us. So I think over time I kind of developed into seeing myself the way he sees us, and so that bolstered me to go out into the world and not be phased by the things people say, especially when it comes to my scars. It is not the way to get at me.

But one good way to get at me would be definitely, I think my voice because that is a little more personal. And sharing that with the world, aside from my family was definitely something that took a very long time.

JAMES: But it was music that put you before the world to show them a person that obviously needed a healing, was experiencing a healing that was deeper than the scars, more than the scars. I would like for our viewers to hear one of those songs that you and another friend wrote. I want you to listen to it. The name again?

KECHI: "Here I Am."

JAMES: And this is who we are. Let him be who he is in us. Listen, watch, be blessed.

[Kechi sings "Here I Am"]

Beat up, broken, brought to my knees
Some say I'll never go far
I've lived with feelings that cover my heart
Along with all of these scars
Then I met you

My whole world changed
You turned me around
I've never been the same
I believe in myself
You are my strength
It's all because of you
You've shown me the light
And I ran down that path
Away from the darkness I knew
I wouldn't be where I am right now
So this one I sing for you
Sending ovation
Please take your bow
I'm forever thankful it's true
Then I met you
My whole world changed
You turned me around
I'll never be the same
I believe in myself
You are my strength
It's all because of you
You've shown me the light
And I ran down that path
Away from the darkness I knew
So many moments I thought I might fall
But by faith, you helped me stand
Now here I am
Oh

JAMES: Wow! Thank you, God!

Thank you, Kechi.

I want you to get this book because it is just full of healing truths.

Simon, I hope that some time I meet you. You're a very gifted person. And just watching you encourage some people that could be so overlooked, maybe some time we could just chat. Not on some kind of television show, I'd just love to talk to you. Thank you for writing the forward to this.

Kechi, we're going to, right now, do something our viewers want to do very badly.

They actually want to help rescue people, Betty, who have been trafficked sexually, beginning most of them as children. Our viewers love what we're doing so much that they're giving right now a \$320,000 challenge gift which means if you would give it, it's an average of \$128 to rescue someone and to begin to restore them. It will be doubled immediately.

You know, Betty, I always ask for big gifts. You don't need help thinking small. \$1280, we can rescue ten from trafficking, but now it will be 20. So whatever you can do. I want you to listen to Sheila Walsh talking to a precious girl who has been trapped and enslaved. Watch closely and prayerfully.

On the mission field

Open Captions

>> An estimated 4.8 million women, girls and boys are currently victims of sex trafficking.

SHEILA: Who is your best friend?

Interpreter: She said no. Nobody.

SHEILA: Do you have anyone that you trust?

Interpreter: No.

SHEILA: Many of the girls I've met on these trips are young, defenseless teenagers and they all have similar stories. They wake up next to a much older, strange man and they're held captive for weeks, months, or even years.

Do you remember that first night? Do you remember what that felt like?

Open Captions

>> It was painful. I cried and ran away. But they hit me and brought me back. I have to sleep with the clients and drink with them. They can do whatever they want.

SHEILA: You and I, as God's sons and daughters, we've got to be the ones telling these girls, "You have a purpose, you have a future, and you have a hope. There is a God who loves you and he is your friend. You are not worthless. You are not worth just \$10 anytime a man comes through the door. You are priceless."

If we don't rescue these girls right now their abuse and misery will continue night after night. It is our responsibility to protect these precious girls, show them the love of God, and help them heal.

End of video

In the studio

JAMES: Dear God, please! Set the men free that are using the girls, and then that are paying for this horrible activity, supporting it. God set them free. But God, help us right now set these girls free, in Jesus' name.

Betty, you and I have been close to these girls, sometimes boys, that are trafficked. It is heartbreaking to realize they have become slaves. But love can set them free and that is what I want all of our viewers to understand.

BETTY: You know, James, you and I have two beautiful daughters. We have beautiful granddaughters, and we have beautiful great-granddaughters. I can't even imagine what it would do to my heart, and all of our family's hearts if something happened to them in this situation. But let me tell you something. These are our grand—our children, our family that I'm talking about, but these children are God's daughters. We need to take the responsibility to reach out to them and help them and put them into the safety and care of people that love them.

JAMES: You know, I'm just really inspired by you every time I talk to you on television, you the viewer. And I did mention the \$320,000 challenge gift now has been given for several years by a group of people who said this is so special to us that we do this together. And it is a group of them, not a very big group, but they put up a tremendous challenge gift.

Now think about this, because for some people it is challenging for people to make a gift. Not many people can drill a water well, but thank God those who can, do. But \$128 is the average it takes to rescue a girl or stop them from getting trafficked and we know how to head it off, and also to go in and set them free. We know what to do and how to do it. But it takes an average of \$128.

With the matching gift, you don't rescue just one with \$128, you rescue two. But it also means that \$64 can rescue one. It's doubled. Thank you to those of you who make the challenge gift. But those of you who are making the best gift you can, knowing it is going to immediately be doubled, what an incredible incentive.

We have some gifts to send you to bless you but you're giving the greatest gift, you're

giving freedom and you're giving life and love. We rescue and we restore all of these that we're able to reach. And I'm asking you please, go get your bank card, use it like a check. Dial the phone number or go online and please make this great life-giving gift. This is liberation! This is setting people free. Thank you so much 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 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 "Believe This, Not That!" featuring the promise from heaven for every need on earth. This book is a resource every believer should have when facing discouragement, pain, fear, or the vast array of negative thoughts that attack all believers.

With your gift of \$128 or more, you'll receive "Experiencing Israel," by Tony Evans. Discover the holy land like never before and view stunning scenes in spectacular full color photography. Also, find practical applications that bring the world of the Bible into your life today!

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

make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio

JAMES: And to those of you who will help us rescue a precious life, we will send you a life that was saved, and a life with scars but a mighty God has lifted Kechi way above those scars and those pains. This will be liberating to so many of you. You help us help these precious children, these girls, and set them free, we'll send this to you if you'd like to have it. Kechi, we love you.

Father, I want you to bless Kechi more than she ever imagined. Thank you for her life. Thank you for your beauty in her, in Jesus' name.

Thanks for being our guest today, Kechi. Thanks for sharing through the scars, and God bless you.

KECHI: God bless you, too.

JAMES: Thank you. Thank you so much for watching and helping us. We so appreciate it.