



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Rescued by the Hand of God

Guest(s): Dave and Barb Anderson

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone and welcome to *Family Talk*. I'm your host, Dr. James Dobson. I hope you know and believe this phrase: "Our God is a God of the impossible." He heals diseases that seem unbeatable. He redeems people who appear to be a lost cause. Our God even saves us from the most perilous of circumstances. As the Psalm says, "there's nothing my God cannot do."

Today, we're going to re-air a classic presentation from a couple who experienced the saving hand of God in an incredible way. David and Barb Anderson are the founders of *Fellowship Ministries*, based in Phoenix, Arizona. Their ministry evangelizes to people all around the world through music and worship. Their first-hand account of God's grace occurred back in 1993, that's when I first heard it. They were on their way back from a missions trip and their plane crashed into the Bering Sea. It's a very dramatic story and I think you will enjoy and be inspired by.

This message was taken from a recording made at Christ the Redeemer Lutheran Church in Phoenix, Arizona. Let's listen now to the Anderson's as they share their story on this edition of *Family Talk*.

Dave Anderson: Barb and I have had the privilege of going to Alaska to places like Unalakleet and Shishmaref and Shaktoolik to present concerts, especially in Eskimo villages. Well, in addition to places like Anchorage and Fairbanks. I made a phone call to the missionary aviation people, friends of ours in Alaska and said, "We'd like to come back to the villages in Alaska. Can we charter a plane and spend a week or two going from village to village?"

And they said sure, we could do that. But then Dick Page, our missionary pilot friend said, "Dave, can I just talk to you a little bit about the possibility of not going to the villages this time, but going to the Russian Far East?"

And he told us that in that area of Russia, there was a community called Lavrentiya, town of about 4,000 people. And these people live in total darkness, spiritually speaking. There's never been a church in Lavrentiya, there's never been an Orthodox church or Protestant or Catholic. There's never been a pastor, never been a missionary. The people have simply never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. Bibles have never been given to them before. Children have never

gone to Sunday school. They don't know the songs that we know. So close to America, and yet totally without the gospel. There are about 35,000 people that live in this Chukotka Peninsula of the Russian Far East. That's the area of Russia that is closest to Alaska.

So, we said, "Yes, we'd love to do that." And we brought with us 3,000 pounds of food, 1,000 pounds of medicine, and then 500 Bibles. We did this in a sort of a convoy of airplanes, small aircraft from Alaska that flew to Russia. Some young people from Soldotna Bible Church in the Kenai Peninsula joined us as well, so there were about 18 or 20 of us all together that sort of invaded Lavrentiya, this town on the Bering Sea, on the other side of the Bering Sea, on the Russian side. In addition to the Bible and the food and the medicine, we brought t-shirts that said John 3:16, spelled out in, of course, words in English on one side of the t-shirt and in Russian on the other side. I think we had about 50 of them and we gave them to children. So almost immediately, even before the services and the meetings began and the concerts, there are these children running around this town with John 3:16 emblazoned on their t-shirts. For some, believe it or not, that was the first exposure to the gospel ever, ever, ever.

Each night we presented concerts in their cultural center, and that's where we presented the gospel night after night. After the close of the last service, the last concert, Wally Kulacoff was standing next to me and tugged at my shoulder and said, "Dave, Rosa would like to be baptized. Would you baptize Rosa?"

And I said, "Absolutely," and so we went into a little side room, it didn't look like this sanctuary at all. It didn't look like any closet at Christ the Redeemer, it was just a very homely, ugly little room. We found some water and Rosa was baptized. As far as we know, the first person in that entire area of the Chukotka Peninsula of the Russian Far East to be baptized into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The next day, we left Lavrentiya. We got in our charter missionary plane, we put our sound equipment in there, speakers, microphones, 88 key keyboard, Roland keyboard. A little bit of luggage. We left most of it with the people with whom we stayed, they needed it more than we did. And then they put 17 empty five gallon gas cans into the plane. There was room for about seven or eight of them in behind the back seat. There wasn't room for the rest of them back there or in any other storage place in the plane, so the only place for them was right in the aisle. They fit absolutely right between the little seat areas of the plane.

And we left Russia. But we got up to 7,000 feet and we're sailing along and we're probably 45 minutes into the flight when there was a very, very strange motion. It wasn't an up and down hit a sort of an air pocket kind of a motion, it was a side to side kind of a motion. I opened my eyes and I looked back at Barb and at Carrie and the most incredible looks on their faces I've ever seen. They were looking at the gas gauges. And I turned around and looked myself and it wasn't more than maybe a minute or two after that with our hearts beating big time that the right engine on the plane quit.

We were at 7,000 feet. We went down to 3,500 feet. And at 3,500 feet, the left engine quit. And 60 seconds later, we hit the water at 90 miles an hour. Hitting the water at 90 miles an hour, most aviation people will say a plane like this will break up and then it would be all over, we'd just be down at the bottom of the Bering Sea in no time. The plane did not break up, and it was absolutely amazing. As we hit the water, we opened up the regular exit and the emergency exit and those doors just went ... They went sailing. It took us about 30 seconds to get out of the plane. On the way out of the plane, you know what we took with us? Empty gas cans, that's right. We didn't have any life jackets, we didn't have any rafts, and it was empty gas cans or nothing.

When we got out of the plane, some people in our group stood on the wing. Some then stood on the top of the plane because the wing was under the water, and pretty soon the whole aircraft was gone. 45 seconds after we got out of the plane, the plane disappeared. A couple hundred thousand dollar, maybe quarter million dollar airplane is sitting at the bottom of the Bering Sea. And then we found ourselves in, from every human standpoint you could ever imagine, in absolutely impossible circumstances. I mean, it was impossible before this, but it just sort of got worse. There were three to five foot swells in the water, the water temperature is 36 degrees. We were two and a half miles from an uninhabited island, but that's way too far in water temperature like that to even think about swimming there. Life expectancy in 36 degree water is about 15 minutes, 20 minutes on the outside.

So, there you've got our circumstances. And we're here today to talk about a great God that pulled us out of those circumstances. What happened in the next minute has got the minds of believers and non-believers just, I don't know what to say, boggled, I guess. At the very moment that our plane's tail disappeared in the water, there was a plane flying overhead, the same size aircraft that we were on, flying from St. Lawrence island to Nome on a regularly scheduled flight that at that moment in time, are you ready, was one hour late. Wasn't supposed to be there, but he was. And he flew right over us. He's halfway between our spot in the ocean and Nome. He's probably another 10-12 miles further beyond us towards Nome when he got contacted by the air traffic controller in Anchorage, the same guy who told our pilot to go up to 7,000 feet, the same air traffic controller who had heard our pilot saying, "We've lost an engine, we've lost another engine, we're going down."

That air traffic controller said to this pilot, Terry Day from Bering Air, flight 4666, "We think we've lost a plane in the vicinity of Sledge Island, did you see anything?"

And Terry Day comes back on the radio with the most incredible comment. It's all recorded, by the way, and we've got a tape recording of all of these transmissions. He said, "Eight minutes ago, I thought I saw the tail of a whale, but it could have been the tail of a plane," and so he did a U-turn in the sky and the first thing he did was to circle the island. He reported that there was no sign of life or wreckage. And then he went out to where he kind of sort of

remembered seeing the movement in the water. He went right over our heads. I'll never forget it. He went sailing right beyond us and I'm thinking, "Oh, this is one of those stories where somebody's in the ocean and a big ship comes by and goes right straight by and that's the last anybody sees of them."

But then he did another U-turn in the sky and he came back over us and he began to circle over the area where he kind of remembered the movement in the water. There are no street signs out there. You can't go back to the corner of 1st Avenue and 2nd Street and say, "That marks the spot."

As he circled over us for four minutes, he saw nothing, and then a passenger in his plane hollered to the pilot, "There are people down there! Two people and a lot of debris."

We've always wondered who were the people and who were the debris. But we've never been able to discover that. They reported that to the air traffic controller in Nome and it was reported in Anchorage and also to Nome, and rescue efforts had already begun, or efforts to do something had already begun and now they were really put into high gear. They found that there were two helicopters available. Incredible. One is a helicopter that was sitting on the ground at the airport in Nome that was used for delivery of mail and food and such to islands that did not have runways. It's gone from Nome a lot, but at that moment it was sitting on the runway. There was another helicopter that had only arrived in the area the day or two before and three or four days later it left. It's never been back, as far as we know. It was doing geological survey work.

40 minutes after we crashed into the water, the first of the two helicopters showed up. By that time, we had separated all over the place. The pilot of the larger of the two helicopters said later in documents that were put together for the FAA and the National Safety Transportation Board that we were in an area of the equivalent of three football fields. When the first helicopter arrived, 25 minutes of incredible rescue began. Let me tell you that these helicopters were not equipped to rescue anybody from anything. They didn't have any hoists or ladders or life jackets or life savers or rafts or anything. They weren't equipped to rescue anybody from anything.

And so, the two gentlemen who were on the larger helicopter got out on the skid of that helicopter, as did the one man who was in the other helicopter there to help, he was the guy doing geological survey work. They're out on the skid of the helicopter, they're not tethered to anything. Can you picture that? They're not tied to the machine at all, they're hanging on for dear life with one hand and then they're trying to reach down into the water to get in contact with the collar of a person or the hand of a person and that person, we had to be up at the top of the swell at just the right moment in order for that rescuer to make contact with us.

It took about four or five passes for each one of us before we were able to make contact, and then we couldn't cooperate in the rescue at all. We were

absolutely exhausted. We were suffering from hypothermia, we were numb, we had no strength in any part of our body. One in our group was unconscious at that point. So it was a matter of lifting dead weight out of the water. And we're not only hefty people, some of us at least, but we had clothes and were sopping wet and it just only made it worse. They first rescued Carrie, and that's interesting. Brian Brasher, who was the first person they came to, it's a 23 year old helper who traveled with us, running our sound equipment and so forth, was really the first person they came to. And they actually had a hold of his hand, and then he realized that Carrie was just about to give up. Brian knew that, and so Brian gave up being rescued first and pointed to that person over there, you see, you couldn't talk to anybody. When you have a helicopter of that size, a jet helicopter hovering at the surface of the water, you cannot imagine the noise. And the spray of water, it's unbelievable. It's like somebody puts a hose in your face, practically.

And so, they got a hold of Carrie, and then they got a hold of me. And then the helicopter that now two of us were on went after our pilot, and he was already unconscious, he was about a foot beneath the surface of the water. It looked like they were going to lose him, and they got him, and I'll never forget the sight of him being brought up to the surface of the water and he subconsciously just went ... with the biggest gulp of air you've ever heard in your life, and they were able to get him on board.

While this was happening, the other helicopter was going for Barb. By this time, you were on the verge of giving up.

Barb Anderson:

Well, I'm going to back up just a little bit, because there are a couple of important things, and as long as I'm sharing this morning, that I'd like to just share with you. When I was in the water and I could see the helicopters coming, I can remember thinking just before they came, and I feel that God had thermalized my body, because I didn't feel the extent of the cold until that moment. And I can remember thinking, "I hope those helicopters get here soon, because I'm starting to get very cold."

When the helicopter came to me, we had some difficulties. I had to let go of my gas can that was holding me up. I didn't want to let go of my gas can, but I knew if I was going to get into that helicopter, this little can that was my life saving device, I was going to have to let go of. And I did, and at one point the helicopter nearly came down on my head. And then at another point, when I knew I had to raise a hand and my rescuer kept reaching for me, I thought, "I just want to give up and stay in this water. It's warmer, now I'm starting to get cold. I don't have any energy."

And at the last moment that the helicopter was going to go by me, it flashed into my head, "I better catch on to this man right now or I won't have another chance." And I reached up and I grabbed the rung of that helicopter, and I will never forget my rescuer letting go of both of his hands. He had one that he was hanging onto the door with. Reaching me, letting go of that hand and grabbing

me and just pulling me up between his knees. I didn't like that. And yet, up we went into the air. And I decided, "I'll just relax and let this happen."

And then I really began to slip, and then the rescuer knew it. I can remember his saying to the pilot, I heard it. All my senses were kind of really awakened. I mean, I thought I was hearing voices in clear, clear ways. I heard that conversation so clearly, and even the pilot and my rescuer can't imagine how I could have heard it. But I heard him say, "Go down, go down, she's slipping!"

I knew that I was going to go back into that water. And I'm not a diver. I like to be in the water and paddle around, but even in the days when I was learning how to swim and dive, I always had to plug my nose and plug my ears. I just didn't like that at all. I had presence of mind enough to rehearse how I was going to land in that water and when I dropped back down into the water, I planned so that just when I hit that water, I grabbed my nose. I did, and it worked really well for a while, but it seemed like I went an awfully long time down under that water. So then I had to let go of my nose and then it was a long time getting up. The weight of that jacket that helped me to float because it was so buoyant was weighing me down. I had to fight to get to the surface. My lungs filled up with water and my nose and everything, and I came back to the surface finally, but I knew I was drowning. I knew that I was dying at that point.

After a time, when the helicopter made contact with me to see that I was there, I just knew there was no hope for me. And I rehearsed how you can die easily by drowning. I remembered reading stories about you just inhale a lot of water and it can happen really quickly. And then I thought, "But I'm just going to roll over on my back and let this happen," and I rolled over on my back and I put my arms out and I just said, "Jesus, Jesus." His name came to my lips. "Jesus."

And you know what? At that very moment, when I knew I was dying, God gave me a wonderful peace to die.

Dave Anderson:

The rescuer who had jumped off the skid just at the point when Barb was deciding it was okay to die and she was rehearsing this and how it was going to transpire, he said, "I'm here."

And she turned around and there he was, and he got a hold of her and brought her to a boulder that was half submerged near the shore of this island. And then the larger of the two helicopters eventually came back. Then in a few minutes, they repositioned us in these helicopters. Now there are seven of us, there are seven of them, helicopter pilots and the rescuers. 14 people, the helicopters are overloaded, and they flew us back the 22 and a half miles to Nome. Ambulances were there to pick us up, brought us to the hospital and we began the process of warming up. We found out that on the way to the airport, the guy who picked me out of the water stopped at the Nome fire department to pick up the only logical things he could think of. We found out several months after this whole story had happened, that the only thing they had on board were seven

body bags. Because nobody's ever survived a plane crash in the Bering Sea before, and that whole area of the ocean. It's never happened.

We want to remind you today that God's a God of rescue. Here's some Psalms. From Psalm 22:8, "Let the Lord rescue him." Psalm 31:2, "Come quickly to my rescue." 69:14, "Rescue me from the mire." 91:14, "I will rescue him." Psalm 143:9, "Rescue me from my enemies."

And then we know the story from Daniel where God rescued his servant Daniel from the lion's den. Impossible circumstances.

When you feel like you're drowning, He's there. His hand is there. His presence is there. God's a good God. And when I get to Heaven, I'm looking up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. I sort of figure they must be Scandinavians and they just left off the last names. Larson and Bjorkstrand and, you know, Peterson. I don't know if that's true or not. But when I get to heaven, I'm looking up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Because as surely as there were four in the furnace, there were eight in the water. Will somebody say amen?

Barb Anderson: Amen.

Congregation: Amen.

Dave Anderson: As surely as there were four in the furnace, there were eight in the water.

Congregation: Amen.

Dave Anderson: Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you're a God of rescue. From physical circumstances, from spiritual circumstances in our lives, emotional circumstances, depression, illness, alienation from loved ones, broken hearts, you've come to heal and to forgive and to be the God of impossible circumstances, the God who brings hope in the midst of our trials, and the God of new beginnings. I pray that somebody this morning will leave this place realizing again that you're a great God.

Dr. James Dobson: What an incredible illustration of God's protection and provision in the face of certain death. I'm Dr. James Dobson and you've been listening to David and Barb Anderson as they shared their incredible first-hand account of being saved by the very hand of God, here on *Family Talk*.

You know, I love the fact that God is in the business of saving lives. Lives that have been torn apart by pornography and child abuse and infidelity. It's our mission here at *Family Talk* to give hope and encouragement to those who feel that they have no hope. We have many valuable resources to assist those who are in dire need of restoration. To take a look at our resources, simply go to our website at drjamesdobson.org and click on the resource tab at the top of the page.

Roger Marsh:

That's right, Doctor. And friends, remember you can also give us a call any time day or night as well. We are happy to answer questions you have about *Family Talk*, the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, and to point you in the direction of some great resources on our website. We also love praying with you as well. So please give us a call with your prayer needs, (877) 732-6825. That's (877) 732-6825.

I'm Roger Marsh, and I don't know about you, but I was so inspired by the story of Dave and Barb Anderson's rescue from the Bering Sea. What an absolute testament to God's might. This month, in fact, actually marked the 28th anniversary of that dramatic rescue. The Anderson's are still active in ministry work, by the way. They are the founders of Shepherd's Canyon Retreat Ministry and Standing Stones Conference and Retreat Center. Shepherd's Canyon Retreat Ministry is a specialized counseling program for exhausted church workers and their spouses, many of whom feel tapped out. As an ordained minister myself, I can totally relate. Some days I feel so overwhelmed, but I have to remember we must all stay in the field and also in the fight. I sincerely encourage you to do so, especially if you're in the role of ministry.

For those of you who are looking for some inter-pastoral support and encouragement, I have a very useful resource. You can learn more about the Shepherd's Canyon Retreat, which is located in the beautiful foothills above Phoenix in Wickenburg, Arizona. To learn more, visit their website at shepherdscanyonretreat.org.

Thanks so much for listening to *Family Talk*, from Dr. Dobson, his wife Shirley, Dr. Tim Clinton, and all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. God's blessings to you and your family.

Announcer:

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.