



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Words of Kindness, Source of Healing

Guest(s): Florence Littauer

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello, everyone. I'm James Dobson, and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Roger Marsh: Welcome to Family Talk, a division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. You know, when you think about it, the words we use and the words we hear can really have so much power in our lives. For example, a child just fell off a bike, and with the right words of encouragement, you can help that little boy or girl shed any fear and confidently get back on and ride again. In the same way though, think about a harsh or mean word from a school bully or a teacher, or maybe even a parent.

That criticism can stick with you even through adulthood. When it comes to words and the ways we use them, I'm reminded of Proverbs 18:21, "Life and death is in the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." Boy, those words ring so true. On today's classic edition of Family Talk, we're going to hear some powerful words from the late Florence Littauer. Florence grew up in a three-bedroom home behind her father's general store during the Great Depression, and out of the 40 books that she wrote, she's probably best known for the one entitled *Personality Plus: How to Understand Others by Understanding Yourself*.

Now, that book sold over one and a half million copies, and it's been one of Dr. Dobson's all-time favorite books. In July of 2020, Florence Littauer went home to be with the Lord at the age of 92. Now, what you're about to hear in today's presentation is Florence talking about her book entitled *Silver Boxes: The Gift of Encouragement*. You'll hear her encourage us to think of what we say as if it were like a silver box with a bow on top, a gift that we are giving to the ones to whom we are speaking. Let's listen now to Florence Littauer right here on this classic edition of Family Talk.

Florence Littauer: I was sitting in a church, and I was just one of the people in the congregation, and as I was sitting there, the pastor looked down at me, and he said, "I see that Florence Littauer's in our audience this morning." Said, "I think it would be nice if we had her come up front and say a few words." So I got out of my seat and started up the aisle. As I started up the aisle, he looked down and he said, "In fact, why don't we have Florence do the children's sermon this morning?" As I

was coming, trying to figure out what I was going to do with this situation, I noticed that little children were coming out of all the aisles.

I mean, he had little children coming up front. They were used to this. They knew what happened every week, and all of the children came up front so that by the time I got to the front, there was this whole group of children in front of me. So as I looked at this little group, I thought to myself, "What am I going to say to them? I'll teach them a verse."

The verse that came to my mind immediately was a verse that we had used with our children, and the verse is Ephesians 4:29, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." And they all looked wide-eyed, and they said like, "Oh," and I said, "Do you think you can understand that?" Oh, they didn't know if they can understand that or not. I said, "Well, let's start it right at the beginning." It says, "Let no corrupt communication."

I said, "Now, what is corrupt communication?" One little boy spoke up and he said, "Being nasty to your mother." Said, "That's right. Don't do that. That's bad."

And they all agreed, "That was bad to do. We shouldn't try that one." We went on and they pulled out little things, what it meant, all kinds of bad things to say. Then, I said, "All right, that's what the verse says we are not to do. Now, let's look and see what should we do. So it says that we should let no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouths, but that which is good to the use of edifying. What does edifying mean?"

Well, they look kind of wide about that. That's a big word. Then, one of the boys said, "Build up." I said, "That's right, build up, that our words are supposed to build up other people." Then, I went on to the next part of it.

It says, "Not only is it good to the use of edifying, but it is to minister grace." Now, that's heavy stuff for little children, minister grace. So what does it mean, minister grace? Somebody had taken a class somewhere that said that grace was God's unmerited favor. So this little child spoke up, "God's unmerited favor." I was amazed at the size of this child, that they knew that little phrase.

They didn't have any idea what it meant, but they knew the word. Somebody taught it to them. So I said, "All right, that's good. That's wonderful, that that means that God has given us a favor. That's what grace is."

"So if I'm to give you grace, I'm to do you a favor." Said, "Now, how could I do you a favor?" Well, we went from favor into present, into gift, and then we came up with, "Yes, every word that comes out of my mouth should be like a present. I should give you a present with my words." I went on with that for a while with them, and as I did, one little girl, and I'll never forget this little,

precious child, she stood up at the end of the row, she turned to all the people, and she said to them, "What she means is ..."

Amazing how a little child, she'll interpret it so the adults can understand. She said, "What she means is that our words should be like a little silver box with a bow on top." I looked at her and I said, "That's right." And I'll never forget, even though I have no idea what that little child's name was, but I'll never forget her saying, "What she means is your words should be like a little silver box with a bow on top." Just the last year and a half that I've been working with this little concept off and on, it's made a difference to me.

It's made me measure my words in a different way. I began to think back, and I said to myself, "How have you spoken to your children?" And as I thought about it and I realized that it was easy for me to give silver boxes to my daughter, Marita. She and I have always agreed on everything. It was not hard for me to give silver boxes to Lauren.

She always did everything right. Now, you might say, "Isn't that wonderful, she's had these two perfect children?" But now, I have an adopted son. Adopted son, Fred is nothing like me at all. He and I have never had two thoughts in our entire lifetime that coordinated.

And I began to think about, "What had I said to him?" I remembered one day when he came home, and he said to me, "Mrs. Johnson said that I have a charming personality." Now, I don't know what you parents would've said, but before I even had a hesitation for a moment, I shot out with the comment, "I'd sure like to see some of that charm around here." Now, when you put that in the context of the silver box, Mrs. Johnson had given Fred a silver box. And what had I done?

I, as the mother, had taken away the praise he'd received. I looked back at my childhood and I wondered, "Where did I get the affirmation? How did I go from being a child in three rooms behind a store without a ghost of a chance to amount to anything, remembering the lady that looked at my two brothers and me during the Depression as we stood in the store, and as she looked at us, she said to my mother, 'It's a shame there's no hope for those children because they appear so bright.' That wasn't a silver box. I remembered saying to myself, "Florence, you'll show that lady." And I worked to get there, but I thought back, I thought, "How did you do it? Who encouraged you?"

And as soon as I began to think about it, as you might begin to think about your childhood, I realized that even though my mother never gave me a lot of affirmation, and when I asked her why she didn't compliment me, she said, "You never know when you're going to have to eat your words." Mother was always afraid she'd have to eat a few words. She felt it's better not to say any than to have to eat them. So I thought about it. I thought, "Well, where did I get my affirmation?," and I realized I had a father who was affirming. I had a father who was constantly giving us positive words, who was positive every single day, who

was lifting people up, who during the Depression in our little store, people would come to our store just to hear my father's encouraging words.

I remember back to my senior year in college, and I came home, he said to me one day, right after Christmas, "Florence, come in the back room. I want to show you something." So I went into the back room with him. He never took me there, he never left out of the store, and we went back into this little, tiny den, which was the only little haven we had, a little den with two pieces of furniture, a piano on one wall and a couch on the other that opened up, and when you opened it up, you could sit on the end of the couch and play the piano. That's the size of the room.

So here it was, you had wall to wall bed. We went in there that day, and my father reached behind that piano. You know those upright pianos that have all the little holes in them? My father reached behind the piano, brought out this little box, little cigar box, and he opened it up, and I looked at it, I said, "What's that?" He said, "It's a box that I had, and I hid it away." He said, "Somehow today, I felt like showing you this box."

I looked in there because I'm a curious person. If I'd known there was a box tucked away, I would've been looking at it, but I didn't know it was there, and he showed it to me. It was full of clippings. I looked in there, there were newspaper clippings, and I said, "What are these?" He said, "These are articles that I've written."

I said, "You can write?" I said, "Why didn't you tell me you could write?" It was almost like I deserved to know I had a smart father. Why hadn't he told me before? I said, "Why didn't you tell me that?"

He said, "Because your mother always said because you don't have an education you shouldn't try to write. What if you try and it wasn't any good? We'd all be humiliated." My mother was always afraid we'd be humiliated. So she never encouraged us to do anything, to take any risks or any chances. So my father, he said, "I knew I could write."

He said, "I knew inside of me there was an ability to write," so he said, "I would write when your mother was out, and I would write and I would send it into newspapers, and I'd watch the newspaper until it came out, and then I'd cut it out, and I'd put them all in this box." He said, "Somehow today I wanted to give you the box," and I took that box and I looked through it. I couldn't believe all these things my father had written. Important things. As I got to the bottom, there was a letter in there from the United States Senate.

I always have been interested in politics, I've always been interested in personalities, and it was from Henry Cabot Lodge, Sr., and I opened up this letter and it was to my father, and I said, "What did Henry Cabot Lodge write you for?" and he said, "Well, I wrote him a letter, telling him how he should run

his campaign better." He said, "Because of that, he wrote me back a letter and it was a personal letter, two pages typed." And it said, "Dear Walter Chapman," and then it went down, "This idea was very good. I will implement that in my next campaign. This idea, I cannot use for this reason," and he enumerated everything, two pages, answering my father's letter, sharing with him what he liked about what he'd said and how he thanked him and appreciated what he'd done for him.

As we left that little room to go back into the store, my father put his hand on my shoulder, and he looked at me, he said, "Florence, I think I tried for something too big this time." And I said, "What's that?" He said, "Well, I wrote into our denominational magazine, and I told them how they ought to change the way they chose the nominating committee for the National Convention." He said, "It's been three months now, and they haven't published it yet," and then he looked at me again, and he said, "Florence, I guess I've tried for something too big this time." Those were the last words my father ever said to me, because the next day, my mother and he took the first day off they'd had in 20 years.

I stayed home and took care of the store with my two brothers. My mother and father went into Boston at 4:00 in the afternoon, walking through the subway station in Park Street in Boston. My father dropped to the pavement. At the morning of the funeral, I was sitting in the store, opening up the cards that had come. For those days, many cards had come because you see, everyone loved my father because he gave them encouraging words.

As I opened up these cards of sympathy from all the people that came into our store, I noticed the magazine, our denominational magazine. I never would've looked at it at such a time, except my father told me. I opened up that magazine and looked through it, and inside there was my father's article. I'm so grateful today that my father showed me that box, because you see, I have those clippings, and I have framed on my wall at home. I have the article from that magazine and a picture of my father, and I also have the letter from Henry Cabot Lodge, Sr, and I went back to Boston, and I got a picture of him, and I have Henry Cabot Lodge and his letter, and my father and his article, and I have those framed on the wall in my study so that every day as I pass by, I'll remember the value of an encouraging word, because you see, my father had a box of broken dreams, things he could have been if only someone had encouraged him.

Roger Marsh: You are listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. If you just joined us, we are sharing a timeless message from the late Florence Littauer on the power of encouraging words. Her next story will also remind us of the potential damage of negative or unspoken words. Here once again is Florence Littauer on Family Talk.

Florence Littauer: One time, I sat down with my husband's mother. We'd never had anything much to say to each other. She seemed to be a superior being. She seemed to be above everybody else. She was elegant and beautiful, said the right things,

did the right things, had the big home, knew how to pour tea out of silver pots, all the things I'd never learned.

I looked at her with envy all my life. I was afraid of her because she was so put together. So I'd never really had a one-to-one conversation with her until this one night, just a number of years ago. When I sat with her in her living room and I didn't know what to say to her, and I asked one of those trite questions. I said, "Mother, what was it like when you were young."

Not knowing what I'd get for an answer, and she said, "Oh." Immediately, she said, "Oh, I remember when I was in college, I had this boyfriend, and I was so in love with him. We were going to get married." She went on telling me about this, and I looked at her wide-eyed. I'd never thought of my mother-in-law having a boyfriend.

Somehow, it just didn't seem to make sense. As I looked at her, and so I said to her, "Well, tell me about it, mother," and she told me that she and he were going to get married, and when they graduated from college, "We went two separate directions for the summer. He was going to call me in the fall, and we were going to get married." I said, "Well, what happened?" She says, "Well, when the fall came, he never called. I never heard from him again."

I said, "Well, what did you do?" She says, "Well, I cried a lot." Tears came down her cheeks. I'd never seen my mother-in-law relaxed. I'd never seen her real, but as I talked to her, she cried and she said, "He never called me, and my mother didn't like him anyway because he didn't come from a rich-enough family."

And her mother's theory always was, "You can marry and fall in love with a rich man, as well as a poor man." That was her family motto. She said, "My mother didn't like him anyway." She says, "After a while, my mother introduced me to Fred Littauer," and she said, "I married him on the rebound." Then, she looked at me and she said, "I never was in love with him."

This is Fred's father. I looked at her and I said, "You weren't?" She said, "No, I did the right things. I played my role," and she said, "I had the five children, and I was the good wife." As she said this, she is crying, and she said, "But I never was in love with him."

What did that make me feel about my mother-in-law, that I'd been judgmental and negative about, that I'd thought, "This is a cold lady?" I never knew she'd had a problem like that before, and I looked at her with a different feeling. Then, she said, "But that's not the end." She said, "A couple of years ago, I went to a party." She's in her 70's then, she says, "I went to this party."

She says, "I looked across the room and there was this man standing there." She says, "I looked at him," and she says, "He looked like that young man that I'd been so in love with." She says, "I walked across the room to get a view so I

could look at him," and she says, "When I got near him, he turned and he looked at me and he said, 'You are Marita.'" She said, "I looked up at him and said, 'You're John,'" and she said, "I started to talk with him." She says, "I looked at him and I said, 'Would you answer me one question? Why did you never call?'"

She said, "He looked at me and he said, 'Oh, I called many times, and each time I got your mother, and each time, your mother said, 'She doesn't love you. She doesn't want to hear from you again. Please don't call.''" He said, "The last time I called, your mother said she's engaged to marry someone else. Don't ever call again."

She looked up at me and she said, in tears, "My mother's words ruined my life." What a different feeling I had about my mother-in-law that day. How bad I felt for the judgment that I had put upon that lady in years past, how aloof I'd felt she was, how artificial, when all the time she was hiding a broken heart. I said to her, "Mother, what would you have been if you could have been anything you wanted to be in your life?" She said, "Oh, I would've been an opera singer."

I said, "An opera singer? I didn't even know you could sing." She said, "That's because I've never sung since I got out of college." I said, "Did you sing before?" She said, "I majored in music."

I'd never known that. Of course, I'd never asked her. She said, "I majored in music," and she said, "I wanted to be an opera star." I said, "Why didn't you go and do it?" She said, "Because my mother said, there's no money in that."

"You'll never make it. You don't have enough talent. Come into the family business, and that way you'll be secure, that way you'll have money." And she said, "So I gave up singing," and she said, "But inside, I've always wanted to be an opera singer." I never knew that about her.

I didn't know she had any hidden desires. Then, she got up from the chair and she went down the hall. She came back with a box. She pulled out some pictures, and in it was this picture. She said, "I want you to see this picture."

She said, "This is a stage set," she said, "Because I want you to know that I did once have the lead in an opera." She says, "It was my senior year in college." She says, "Here I am, right here in the center." She said, "I'm that one in the wing chair," and she said, "These are all the cast around me." She said, "I had the lead in the opera."

Now, she gave it to me. She said, "Here, you take this picture. Your daughter's named after me. Give this to Marita. I want her to have it. I want her to know that her grandmother could have been something if she'd ever had the chance, if she'd ever had an encouraging word if someone had given her a silver box."

Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "Many of us die with the music still in us." Fred's mother died with the music still in her. My father died with the music still in him. Each one of them had a box of broken dreams, a box of clippings, a box of pictures, memories of what they'd done that no one knew about, that had never become fulfilled. Both of them died with the music still in them.

During Fred's mother's latter years, when Fred and I went to visit her, her mind had totally left her. She could not communicate, she couldn't say a word. We had no idea whether she could hear what we were saying or not, whether she understood anything. She was unable to articulate a word. I asked the nurse one day when I was down visiting her in Miami here in Florida, and I said, "Does mother ever talk?"

She said, "No. She never says a word." Then, she looked at me, she said, "But that's the strangest thing that every once in a while, she'll stand up and she'll sing opera." Oh, isn't it amazing what's still in our minds? Many times, our minds have forgotten what our heart still remembers.

Her heart still wanted to be an opera singer, and the last night before she died, she stood up at the dinner table, and the nurse told us that she stood there and she sang opera, and she said, "When she'd finished, I clapped for her, and she held her hands and she bowed, and she bowed." You see, the opera was still in her, and she said, "When I went in the next morning, she was asleep with her hands like this, and a smile on her face. She died with the music still in her." In the Song of Solomon, it says, "Yes, the winter has passed. The rains are over and done."

"The flowers appear on the earth. The season of singing has come." Is there someone at home waiting for you to give them a season of singing, who's waiting for a word of encouragement from you? Yes, there may be somebody you know who has a song waiting to be sung, perhaps who has a race waiting to be run, maybe a piece waiting to be played, perhaps a scene waiting to be staged, a tale waiting to be told, or a book waiting to be sold.

Roger Marsh:

Wow, those are certainly profound words from the late Florence Littauer here on Family Talk. Perhaps there's someone in your life who could really use some uplifting words of encouragement, maybe someone you come across in passing each day. You may have heard this quote from Les Brown, "The graveyard is the richest place on earth because it is here that you find all the hopes and dreams that were never fulfilled, all the books that were never written, the songs that were never sung, the inventions that were never shared, the cures that were never discovered." Wow, just imagine how different the world might be and how your life could be changed if the right words of encouragement are shared at just the right time. Remember, God can unlock the potential in others' lives with love and encouraging words from us. On today's broadcast, Florence Littauer reminded us of Ephesians 4:29.

Paul writes, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen." Our words should be like the gift of a silver box with a bow on top, and what a powerful word picture Florence Littauer painted for us today. Now, if you would like to share this broadcast with a friend, or listen to it again, please visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. While you're there, you can listen to many other programs and a variety of different topics if you'd like.

You'll also have access to download free resources to help you navigate a challenge you might be facing as well. And if you're the parent of a strong-willed child, listen up. We understand that every parent will face obstacles in their daily lives from that never-ending pile of laundry and dishes, those messy, little faces that are so cute, but so dirty, and the toys that are on the floor behind them, to what is being taught to your kids at school or the content that they see online. If you are raising kids right now, you know it is hard work. In the words of our own, Dr. Dobson, "Parenting isn't for cowards."

Even children who are sweet and mild-mannered, most of the time come with their own set of challenges as well, but if you have a son or daughter at home who is strong-willed and defiant, that child can wear you out emotionally and physically too, and if you have one or more of these independent, free spirits in your home, you know how difficult life can be. But please, rest assured, there is hope, and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute has a resource just for you. It's our goal to walk alongside you as a parent during every season of the child-rearing years, especially if you have a strong-willed or defiant child in the home. We've developed a new 10-day email series based on Dr. Dobson's best-selling book, *The New Strong-Willed Child*. It's designed to equip you to wisely lead your kids through even the toughest of trials that they might face or that they might put you through.

Now, you can sign up for free when you go to drjamesdobson.org/strongwilledchild. That's drjamesdobson.org/strongwilledchild. I'm Roger Marsh, and I pray that the Lord will continue to richly bless you and your family as you grow stronger and deeper in your relationship with Him.

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

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hi, everyone. This is Dr. Tim Clinton for Family Talk. Where do you go to receive support and advice for your family? We interact with thousands of people every day through our Facebook page. There, you're going to find inspiring advice on what matters most to you.

Whether it's marriage or parenting, you can be sure our profile will keep you updated with how your family can succeed. Visit us at facebook.com/drjamesdobsonsfamilytalk. Each day, you're going to find our latest broadcast, helpful resources, inspirational pictures and quotes, nowhere

else, so you're going to be able to start your day with a thought from Dr. Dobson, as well as a special message before you go to sleep. Remember, you can be sure that every post on our page is created with you and your family in mind. Take time to visit us and become a part of our online community on Facebook, will you? Simply go to facebook.com/drjamesdobsonsfamilytalk.

Dr. James Dobson: This is James Dobson again. As we close today's program, I just want to thank so many of you out there who make this broadcast possible with your contributions, and I want to tell you how much your generosity is appreciated.