



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Peace: Hope and Healing for the Anxious Momma's Heart – Part 1

Guest(s): Becky Thompson

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- 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: 21st-century moms face an unbelievable barrage of stressors. On a day-to-day basis, they are charged with caring, protecting, and providing for their families. They're also confronted with the difficult task of raising kids, which brings its own specific challenges as well. All this to say it is no wonder anxiety, depression and hopelessness are debilitating mothers. Today on Family Talk, we're going to encourage these hurting moms. Our host is Dr. Tim Clinton and his guest is popular blogger and author Becky Thompson. Now, many of you may follow her and remember her previous appearances here on Family Talk. In just a moment, Dr. Clinton and Becky Thompson will talk about her new book called Peace: Hope and Healing for the Anxious Momma's Heart. There'll be addressing the prevalence of worry and anxiety in our culture. She'll also share her own struggles with panic attacks and stress. There's a lot of content to get to, so let's begin. Here now is Dr. Tim Clinton to host this edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.
- Dr. Clinton: Becky, thank you for joining us on Family Talk.
- Becky Thompson: Thanks for having me, Dr. Clinton. It's always a joy to be with you.
- Dr. Clinton: I love having you. I really do. Becky, as we get started, God's doing so much through your life, your ministry. One fun little thing you have going on right now is you have a Midnight Mom Devotional page. It's blowing up, a million followers and a special focus on that page. Do you mind telling us what that's all about?
- Becky Thompson: Yeah, so the Midnight Mom Devotional is a community on Facebook that I run with my own mom, which is so special. And we focus on quite a few things for moms. But one of the things that we've really tuned into is a mom's need for peace and how to overcome anxiety. And that's been, especially now in this season, more than ever, we need peace and we need hope and we just point them to Jesus and reconnect them to the Father's heart.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah, Becky, it's amazing because the anxiety piece is so real. My daughter, Megan, we have a little granddaughter, her name's Olivia and Megan is constantly fussing and so are we. Her grandma, Julie, and myself, worried about her high fevers, choking, falling, getting hurt too. As they grow up, you worry about how they're doing in school, being bullied. There's so many things to add to the list. That's just part of being a mom and a dad, but in this case, so you guys are really trying to minister to moms. Fear, stress, anxiety, it's just insane. And Becky, with the pandemic and everything that's going on, it's just exploded, hasn't it? It's like on steroids, it's on a whole another level, whole another world.

Becky Thompson: It's true. I think a lot of moms struggled with a baseline of anxiety before the pandemic. And then you bring in world catastrophe and disaster and uncertainty and unrest and there's only so much our hearts can take before we have to take practical steps to really recenter on what is true.

Dr. Clinton: Your new book, *Peace: Hope and Healing for the Anxious Momma's Heart*. I love that. I'm going to make sure that's in a central place in Megan's home, Becky, but listen, it couldn't come at a better time, I really believe that. The fear, stress, anxiety thing, I was looking at some stats and it's startling to me that more than one third of Americans have displayed clinical signs of anxiety, depression, or both of them since the coronavirus started. And one age group in particular, I thought was fascinating to me was 18 to 29 year olds are in a high distress group. I wonder why all that's happening, but people are worried Becky about getting the coronavirus, are worried about family members getting coronavirus. And then you throw in the normal vicissitudes of life coming at you. And we're in a real spin, we really are.

Becky Thompson: Absolutely. I talk to personal friends of all ages saying this isn't something that I felt like I struggled with before, but suddenly I understand what so many friends of mine have said over the years, when they said they just couldn't stop worrying. They're saying, I get it now, I understand what they felt like and what it means when someone says, I want to not be worried about this, but I just can't help myself.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah. I also saw where prescriptions for anti anxiety, medications like Klonopin and others, they've surged at least 10% or higher. So I mean, people are trying to figure out what to do, finding peace in the midst of this journey. Especially after a long day's work, you've got kids who may be sick and may have fevers or whatever going on. And it can just drive us crazy. And what I've found too Becky interesting about people on this journey is when the amygdala in your brain is firing and you can't turn it off. And you're waking up all hours of the night and more little things that used to be like ones or twos on the scale of one to 10, they really didn't bother you, are becoming threes and fours. Everybody's getting tense and these things seem bigger than they should be.

Dr. Clinton: And it's compounding things in the frustration and then the stress and the fear and the worry, which leads to anxiety. And I want to talk to you a lot about what

anxiety is and isn't, but they just compound in our lives. And they just take us to places that can get real dark real quick.

Becky Thompson: Absolutely. I mean, I think it's so common and I think making sure that anyone listening in this moment knows how common it is and how they're not alone in what they're experiencing. That's so important.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah. Before we go too far into this, I did want to ask you real quick, I mean, this is also personal for you, isn't it? This is a story that you understand.

Becky Thompson: Yeah, this is my life, this has been my life since I was a young child. I remember displaying signs of clinical anxiety from elementary school and we didn't have the language for it back then that we have now. And maybe we did have the language, but it just wasn't so publicly discussed or at least discussed in the circles that I had grown up in. But now, looking back, I really see that this has been a problem for about as long as I can remember. And so even throughout motherhood and early years of marriage and going backward in time toward college, I can see all of the ways that anxiety has directly impacted my life. But the cool thing Dr. Clinton is that for as long as I've had anxiety, I've also had a relationship with Jesus. And I have known Him as peace and I have known His presence.

Becky Thompson: And I think it's really important to continue the discussion of how we can be people of faith and still experience fear, because that conversation in the church is so important that we get it right. It's just so important that we look at anxiety from all sides.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah. God's word certainly does that Becky. And we have grown up probably memorizing passages, like Philippians 4, be anxious for nothing, but in everything, through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God. Or you go to a passage like Psalm 46, it says, Elohim, God is our refuge and our strength He's a present help during times of trouble, therefore, we won't fear. But that's really, again, hard to do, when everything seems to be coming at you. I was talking to a lady the other day and she just said, she looked at me and said this, "Tim, we can't take any anymore." I mean, we're crying out to God saying, please, God, help us right now. And that's where again, it's easy to get confused and lost.

Dr. Clinton: Becky, I want to press in on the concepts of fear and stress and worry and anxiety for a moment, to help people understand. And maybe I can hand that to you for a moment, but I would start out this way, that it's a state of feeling uneasy. When scripture says, it weighs us down, anxiety in a man or woman's heart, weighs them down. Go back to your story for a moment, Becky, how it began to weigh you down and began to consume you and what it can really look like in a person's heart.

Becky Thompson: So for me personally, and I think that's probably the best way for me to continue describing anxiety because I can't speak for anyone else. For me, anxiety has shown up different ways in different seasons, but the one thing that's been a constant is the relentless cycle of thoughts that I know deep in my heart aren't true. So if I began to feel as though my kids are in an unsafe situation, when they're at school, just in the building at school and perhaps pre pandemic is a better way to describe this feeling. I would send my kids off and they would be in the school building. And I would know that everything was fine. I would know that they had responsible teachers in a safe environment, that they had wonderful counselors and nurses and professionals caring for them throughout the day. But no matter what I would be doing, no matter what else I would try to turn my attention to, my heart and my thoughts would go back to, but what if they're not okay? How can I protect them from here?

Becky Thompson: How can I make sure that everything that needs to be all right is all right if I can't control it, if I can't oversee it? And so I guess for me, it's this need to know that it's okay, that everything turns out okay, that nothing's actually going to break or fall apart and no disasters actually going to come. And so in my own mind and my own heart, I will experience this need to constantly reassure or check or feel the walls around me to know that I'm actually enclosed and safe.

Dr. Clinton: I was reading in Philippians 4 again, and the word anxious in the Greek can be interpreted like this, to be divided or distracted. That when you get consumed with worry and fear and stress, and when the anxiety is prolonged, you can really get confused here. You want the peace of God that Paul's talking about in Philippians 4, but it's so hard to go there. In the Latin I saw where anxious, the word anxious, can be interpreted this way. It's choking or has overtones of strangling. In other words, it's like choking off or strangling out the good. It's strangling out the peace that we're looking for. And as a result, you start feeling like you're tied up in knots and you're right. You can't turn that brain off even though you want to, even though you try to, even though you pray and you say, God, help me. It's like, please help me, God, turn this off. The more it builds and the more it festers, the more consuming it is.

Becky Thompson: And that's exactly right. And that's where I feel like it's so important to say that, for those that do read the word, that do spend time in worship, who are praying and inviting God, inviting his Holy Spirit to help in every way. And it just isn't changing their situation, that it's so important to continue taking additional steps and looking for additional help and looking at all sides of anxiety. And that might include the physical aspects of what's actually taking place in a person's body.

Dr. Clinton: It's interesting, you mentioned the physical side. I was just looking over some of the signs when you have really an anxiety disorder, when you can go to a place where you could be diagnosed with a real anxiety disorder. Sweating, breathing issues, insomnia, heart rate, tension, headaches, ulcers, fatigue, and it's almost that fight or flight response starts to kick in. But Becky, what's wild in there is you can even go to a place where you can begin to develop anxiety attacks or

panic attacks in situations where your mind just takes off on you and you feel like you've just got to get away or get out of that situation. Have you ever gone there?

Becky Thompson: Absolutely, yes I've had. And here's the interesting thing, Dr. Clinton, I didn't know that they were anxiety attacks. I just felt like I had hit a place in my own heart where I just needed a minute. And as a mama, that minute might look like sitting on the floor next to my bed, thinking Jesus helped me breathe, I can't breathe, why can't I breathe? There's nothing different about today than yesterday. There's nothing more overwhelming today than there was yesterday. Why can't I catch my thoughts? Why does today feel more overwhelming than yesterday? And it's so interesting because I have friends that struggle with panic attacks and they'll say sometimes they can feel them coming. They can feel themselves reaching that place where their overwhelm is just overflowing. And then there are others who say, I can be shopping in this store and suddenly feel like there's impending doom. And my heart is racing and nothing has changed about what's going on around me.

Becky Thompson: And I guess I could say I had both, I've had moments when I was in a store, pushing a cart and taking things off the shelf, and I felt like it was all okay, and then suddenly Dr. Clinton, I couldn't see, I was having tunnel vision. My eyesight was changing, my blood pressure was changing, my heart was racing. I was sweaty like you described. And in those moments it feels like it does feel like an attack. It feels like your own body is against you.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah. And it begins to affect everyone and everything around you at the same time too, because everybody picks up on it. The good word here, just for a moment. Proverbs 13:12, hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled as the tree of life. God thankfully understands these issues. And by the way, we've learned so much about anxiety that people don't need to stay here. And what I love about your new work Becky, is that's the message you're trying to bring to encourage a mama's heart. And listen, don't stay here, and there's some beautiful things that you have outlined in the book and I want to go through them, but Becky, what helped you start breaking free?

Becky Thompson: Dr. Clinton, the first thing that I did to begin what I would call the walk out of the forest, because that's what I relate anxiety to. It feels like you're walking through a dark forest at night-

Dr. Clinton: That's a great picture.

Becky Thompson: And you don't know how you got there and you don't know the path out and you don't know how long until the dawn breaks. And all you can see is that darkness in front of you. How do you begin to take a step forward and even know it's in the right direction? The first step that I took was saying, this isn't the way it's supposed to be, this isn't how I'm supposed to feel, this isn't the way I ought to feel and this isn't the way I want to feel anymore. And I feel like

because there's such a faith element attached to anxiety that so many believers experience shame for simply feeling afraid.

Becky Thompson: We feel like, well, first of all, we're afraid. And then we wonder what that faith or that fear that we're experiencing says about our faith and what it says about what we believe at our core. And so rather than call out into that dark night, hello, is anybody else out here? Does anybody know the way? We just stumble along on our own, hoping to just one day reach the clearing. And so for me, and for many people on this journey, the very first and most important step is saying, I want to find my way out of the forest of fear and can anyone help me? Can I invite anybody else into this process with me? Counselor, doctor, therapist, friend, pastor, teacher, relative, to help lead me out of the forest of fear. It's so important, but it's the most practical step we can take.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah, because we feel isolated and alone and lost. And I'm with you. I think one of the things I do with clients that I work with is pray with them right upfront, God bring into her life, everything, everyone, every resource possible to help pave the way for a new journey here. Becky, a couple of pearls that I think go with this, that you wrote about. And here's one of them, it's okay not to be okay. Women don't have to feel shame about this condition. For a moment, explain what you mean by that.

Becky Thompson: Well, like I sharing, we wonder what the fear we are experiencing says about our faith and then we're not just afraid, we're afraid of being afraid and we're ashamed of being afraid. And so if I could walk up to a woman and just lift the burden off of her shoulders, that she doesn't have to feel ashamed for feeling the way that she does, that's what I want her to know. I want her to know that the God who loves her, walks with her through the valley, I want her to know that the God who loves her, doesn't meet her on the other side of the forest, but guides her through it. I want the woman who's afraid or ashamed to know that God doesn't fault her for her brokenness, but understand that brokenness is a result of the fall of man. And it's not something that she has to be ashamed of, but it is something that He has an answer for.

Becky Thompson: And so one thing Dr. Clinton, I like to think about is the pastor who pulls his glasses from his jacket pocket to read the scripture at the front of the church. And as he does so, nobody shouts or silently thinks to themselves, man, there's something wrong with that man's face. They just watch the man put on his glasses to correct his eyesight and read the word of God, proclaiming it to be true. And we often take anxiety or mental health or emotional health and put it into a different category of brokenness and say, if they simply had more faith, then they wouldn't be experiencing this. But all brokenness is the same and I feel like it's so important to help listeners and men and women of God, especially know that God has healing and He has hope for them, but He isn't angry with them. He isn't disappointed in them. He isn't faulting their faith. He's saying I can, I sent my son, I sent my son for you, just like I sent my son for everyone else.

Dr. Clinton: God's not mad at you. And by the way, the scripture says that He has been touched with the feelings of our infirmities. In other words, He knows, He understands what you're journeying through right now. Becky, you also said this, those who struggle with anxiety have a problem, but they are not the problem. That's a big time important distinction because a lot of people then, what it does is it drags us back into that shame piece. And people take mental health related issues and they often silence or shame or put a stigma on people who are going through this. And so people don't want to talk about it, which is what they need to do. They need help, they need direction and they live in this. But separating that out there, that they are not the problem is really important. Isn't it?

Becky Thompson: I agree, yes. Anybody else that struggles with any other form of brokenness, we say things like, this is a person and they're struggling with a chronic issue. We don't say they are the chronic issue, but for so many mental health issues or emotional issues, we begin to identify with those issues. We begin to make it an identity rather than an issue. And if it becomes something we're facing, then it has an answer and we can actually separate our identity from the issue and then say, okay, this is a problem, where's the answer.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah. It's interesting, I remember being in graduate school and it was actually my doctoral program. I was at the College of William and Mary and had a professor who taught in what's called therapeutic metaphor. In other words, she liked to tell stories as a part of the healing journey. And she told us a story one night as we were preparing for counseling, she talked about going over into Williamsburg, Virginia, over to the governor's mansion. And there were some beautiful brick sidewalks, Becky. And she said she was walking down the sidewalk and there was this massive Oak tree, she said, it was so beautiful. The lawns were lush green, the tree was stunning, it was moving into early fall and the leaves were starting to change. But she noticed in the sidewalk that there was this root who would come up out of the ground and into the sidewalk and then distorted the bricks. And she saw where they were trying to go to work on that area, trying to restore that part of the sidewalk.

Dr. Clinton: And she said, can you imagine people coming in for a moment and what they're doing is they put, just imagine white cloth sheets around this root that was sticking up through and the damage that had been done to the sidewalk and they're cleaning it all off. And everybody's looking at it, trying to figure out exactly what to do. And she said, off times when we look at our problems, we become overwhelmed with that situation, that issue. And there it is. And she said all the while, think about this, that was an exposed root from that big Oak tree that was just 20 yards to the left and massive and beautiful and stately and strong. But we get consumed over here because it becomes the consuming force in our life.

Dr. Clinton: And I think that happens so often, don't you? Not to minimize the problem, but it can become that stately. And she said, she called it the 80/20 rule. That probably about 80% of your life is really in control and 20% is out of control say,

but the 20% becomes the 80% and the 80% becomes the 20% over here, Becky, and we can get lost in that.

Becky Thompson: Right. And that's a beautiful example. We've got to remember. We are strong Oaks. We are strong trees and the Lord remembers who we are and He's the one that corrects and helps us with every twisted group.

Dr. Clinton: Becky, your time is all but gone. It's unbelievable to me. Let's continue this discussion tomorrow.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening part one of Dr. Tim Clinton's interview with author and blogger, Becky Thompson here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And I know this conversation shed some light on the crippling anxiety that many moms are experiencing today. Be sure to tune in again on tomorrow's broadcast for the conclusion of this meaningful discussion. In the meantime, be sure to visit drjamesdobson.org to connect with Becky Thompson and to learn more about her brand new book. That's drjamesdobson.org. Now, in case you didn't know, there are numerous ways to stay up to date with our latest programs here at Family Talk. You can always listen online through drjamesdobson.org or access our broadcasts through your Amazon Alexa. Family Talk is also available through the podcast app on your smartphone, simply search for Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, or if you're looking for a simpler way to enjoy our programs, you can always request a program CD, call (877) 732-6825 and ask one of our team members for a polished physical copy.

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