



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Ministering to the Elderly – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Missy Tate & Danae Dobson

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Roger Marsh: Welcome everyone to this very special edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and today we're going to zero in on the proper value that we must place on the elderly in our lives. And this is a special topic to our host, Dr. James Dobson, who joins me now. Doctor, take just a moment and explain why you wanted to share with our listeners on this most important subject today.

Dr. Dobson: I received a personal letter from a friend of mine named Rudy Mark Miller. Rudy has been a great friend to me for more than 30 years and I talked to him just the other day. And on this occasion he shared a suggestion with me which I took very seriously because it came from Rudy and because it was a good idea-

Roger Marsh: Indeed, yeah.

Dr. Dobson: ... Rudy wrote, "Your radio program addresses Mother's Day and Father's Day and Valentine's Day in the most sensitive and beautiful ways. Is it possible once in a while to do a program which reminds us of our forgotten moms and dads and sisters and brothers and friends who are in rest homes or live alone and face each day, Christmas included, not knowing who cares about them, or even acknowledges their existence more than once a year?" And do you know a lot of those people write to us in kind of shaky handwriting, for somebody that may be 80 or 90, and just writes to say, "I listen to you. I'm blessed by what you do. I'm praying for you." Those people really touch my heart and they've obviously touched Rudy's heart, and he passed along this idea that we ought to talk about the elderly and their needs for love and care as the years roll by. And that's exactly what we're going to do today. Not just today, but on tomorrow's broadcast as well.

Roger Marsh: Well, I certainly can't wait to dive into this discussion, Doctor. The elderly community is a very important and growing demographic in our society. I was reading the other day that by the year 2030, nearly one out of every five Americans will be senior citizens. That's a pretty major part of the population. We really need to do a better part to love and care for the elderly in our lives, because quite frankly, we will be there someday as well.

Dr. Dobson: Well, and it happens to everybody and I'm telling you it comes very quickly. Anyway, that's what we're going to talk about today. What we're seeing is reversing of the demographic pyramid, where fewer young people are encouraging and supporting the older population. A lot of people are neglected because of that, and we need to focus more on those that are in some cases, the least of these, my brethren. Many of them have no money at all and my heart goes out to these folks. I mentioned earlier that we get letters from people. They often apologize because they can't help us. And we just want to know what we can do for you. And they're often some tears that go along with that.

Roger Marsh: Well, that's right. And doctor, this ministry exists to encourage and lift up those in our audience. In fact, before we dive into today's broadcast, I'd like to remind our listeners of our phone number. It's (877) 732-6825. A member of our team is standing by and ready to pray with you through whatever you might be facing. So, make sure you have our number handy and if you feel led to do so, please call us right now, (877) 732-6825. Okay. With that, Dr. Dobson, why don't you tell us about our guest for today?

Dr. Dobson: Well, we were talking to Missy Tate who joined us in the studio to talk about this subject. Missy went home to be with the Lord in 2005, but at the time of our recording, she was the head of Missy Tate Ministries which ministered to people in nursing homes, and she would sing and speak in rest homes all over the country. She was truly a blessing to everyone who came in contact with her, and she shared the love of Christ with those that many in the world would just as soon forget.

Roger Marsh: Indeed. Well, with that proper setup, let's hear your rich conversation with the late Missy Tate right now on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Dobson: Missy, you're an ideal person to discuss what we've been talking about in the suggestion from Rudy Mark Miller, and it is really a delight to have you here.

Missy Tate: Oh, Dr. Dobson, it's an honor. It really is.

Dr. Dobson: Tell me why, of all the things that you could devote your life to, you chose going into places that some people would consider depressing and unpleasant?

Missy Tate: I feel it very comfortable. I know that's where God is leading me, and I truly feel that going into a nursing home setting is a very comfortable situation for me. But I also know that I'm going to meet a group of people that have certain needs and hopefully God will help me meet those needs for them.

Dr. Dobson: It's heartbreaking to see it, isn't it?

Missy Tate: Well, for some people it is. I don't find it that way. I find it a joyous opportunity because these people are at the jumping off point. They are ready to go to

heaven and I just feel it's a great opportunity to minister to them. And I think that's where the story of Irma comes in and why I'm doing what I'm doing. And Irma, I was there the day she was brought into the nursing home, 87 years old. And boy, was she something to behold! She was a real detriment to the nursing home. She'd curse at you. She'd call you everything in the book. And I went away on summer vacation and came back, and lo and behold, the recreational director came up to me and said, "You have to sing with Irma." And I said, "Are you kidding? She'll swat me." "No, no, no, no. Go up to the microphone and sing with her." And I did. Oh, she had a beautiful voice. Found out she was her church organist.

And she had definitely changed. I asked her nurses and they said she had a personality change. I asked her doctors, they said it was her medicine. Well, I went into her room one afternoon and I said, "Irma, it's Missy." "Oh yes, the nice lady who sings with me." And I said, "Yes. Irma, you're different." "Oh, I know I am." I said, "What changed you?" She said, "Well, I know you asked me a lot to come down to those meetings." And she said, "I liked the music, but I didn't want to hear any preaching." But she said, "I rolled my wheelchair close enough one day..." And she said, "I heard the pastor say, 'If you'd only raise your hand and ask Jesus in your heart, you will have peace.'" And she said, "Missy, I had nothing left in life." And she said, "I raised my hand." And she said, "I know two things." And I said, "What's that?" She said, "I know where I'm going when I die. I know I can accept any circumstance I'm in." And through that grew a ministry of sharing Christ with our seniors.

Dr. Dobson: What are those homes and institutions like? Describe what happens there.

Missy Tate: Well, there's a variety. I think some of them are beautiful, very palatial, some are in between and then some are at the other spectrum, rather smelly and dirty and that type of thing. But they are filled with people that have great expectations, but there's a lot of loneliness there too. The statistic was 87% of nursing home patients did not receive one visitor in their stay at the nursing home.

Dr. Dobson: Can you put a human face on that? What's that loneliness like? You've met so many people there, can you help us understand it? Statistics don't get it done, what does that really mean?

Missy Tate: Basically, there's a schedule that they keep. They get up in the morning, they're washed, they're fed and then they sit and they wait. The recreational director many times plans programs, plans activities. Then they eat, then they take a nap, then there's another activity, then they eat and then they go to bed. It's a very scheduled situation.

Dr. Dobson: Day after day after day?

Missy Tate: Day after day after day.

Dr. Dobson: I flew into Chicago many years ago as a young man for a business trip and there was a big convention there, and the hotel that I had reservations at had lost those reservations and they felt responsible for me, but they didn't have any room for me. And they started calling, trying to find a place for me to go that night. And they called all over the place and they finally found a room in a nursing home, big 10 story building that had been a hotel, had gone bankrupt and then it had been given to that purpose. And so they got me a room there. And so I drove out to a suburb of Chicago and spent the night in that nursing home. And the next morning, my eyes were really opened. I went down to the lobby and they're these old people sitting in wheelchairs all over the place, maybe 100 people down there. What struck me most and frankly depressed me was that nobody talked to anybody else. There was no interchange, they just sat and stared. Is that characteristic of nursing homes?

Missy Tate: That's characteristic when they're lined up in the hall, but it's not characteristic of them when they're in a group setting. When they're in a group setting, they will respond to the person next to them, which sometimes is their own roommate. But yes, it's a very self-centered or self-focused-

Dr. Dobson: There's not a lot of social life in a place like that-

Missy Tate: No.

Dr. Dobson: ... So, loneliness grows not only because family and friends don't come, but because there's not a lot of social interaction inside.

Missy Tate: Right.

Dr. Dobson: Missy, I have a poem here that I've had in my file for a long time. This is entitled, *Minnie Remembers*, and I think it'll help illustrate what we're talking about.

"God, my hands are old. I've never said that out loud before, but they are. I was so proud of them once , they were soft like the velvet smoothness of a firm ripe peach. Now the softness is more like worn-out sheets or withered leaves. When did these slender, graceful hands become gnarled, shrunken claws? When, God? They lie here in my lap, naked reminders of this worn-out body that has served me too well. How long has it been since someone touched me? 20 years? 20 years I've been a widow , respected, smiled at, but never touched. Never held so close that loneliness was blotted out. I remember how my mother used to hold me, God. When I was hurt in spirit or flesh , she would gather me close and stroke my silky hair and caress my back with her warm hands. Oh God, I am so lonely!

I remember the first boy who ever kissed me. We were both so new at that. The taste of young lips and popcorn . The feeling inside of mysteries to come. I remember Hank and the babies. How else can I remember them but together. Out of the fumbling, awkward attempts of new lovers came the babies. And as

they grew, so did our love. And, God, Hank didn't seem to mind if my body thickened and faded a little. He still loved it and touched it. And we didn't mind if we were no longer beautiful, and it felt so good. And the children hugged me a lot. Oh God, I'm lonely!

God, why didn't we raise the kids to be silly and affectionate as well as dignified and proper? You see, they do their duty, they drive up in their fine cars, they come into my room and pay their respects. They chatter brightly and reminisce, but they don't touch me. They call me mom or mother or grandma, never Minnie. My mother called me Minnie, so did my friends. Hank called me Minnie, too. But they are gone and so is Minnie, and only grandma is here. And God, she's lonely!"

Isn't that beautiful?

Missy Tate: Oh, that's beautiful. Beautiful.

Dr. Dobson: And it conveys what you have seen-

Missy Tate: Yes.

Dr. Dobson: ... As you have interacted with people.

Missy Tate: For sure. I love the story of Lily. Lily had been in a local nursing home for over 15 years and she touched my hand one day and she said, "Missy, why is it taking so long?" I said, "Lily, taking so long for what?" She said, "To die." I said, "Lily, God must want you to be a blessing to someone, that's why He's leaving you here a while." And she said, "A blessing? Why a blessing?" I said, "Well, it's up to God, Lily." I said, "But He wants you to be a blessing to someone." She said, "Me? Who could I ever be a blessing to?" And I said, "Well, maybe to a roommate, maybe to a loved one, maybe to a grandchild, but that's why He's keeping you here so long." She said, "Well, then I'm willing to wait."

Dr. Dobson: That's beautiful.

Missy Tate: Fill that loneliness.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. Missy, let's talk about the practical side of this. There are people out there who have loved ones, relatives, mothers, fathers that are in nursing homes and have not really done their duty to them. It's obvious what we would like them to do and what we're suggesting that they do. For all the others who are listening, you're suggesting that even if they don't have someone there that they know, that they go to a nursing and attempt to reach out to them and love them-

Missy Tate: Yes.

Dr. Dobson: ... How does one do that? You walk through the front door and the nurse says, "Why are you here?" And you say-

Missy Tate: Well, I would suggest a phone call first, but you can go to the front door, that's fine. But you get ahold of the recreational director and say, "I really would like to come and do whatever I can for your people here." But go and don't go at the holiday time. They're inundated with people at the holiday time, go in the dead of winter, go in the dead of summer when they have no one there.

Dr. Dobson: Have you had many experiences where the light went on and a person in the last chapter of life all of a sudden recognizes what they've missed to this point?

Missy Tate: That's why I'm here, and that's why I'm doing what I'm doing.

Dr. Dobson: And why you're recommending it to others. You dealt with one woman who had Alzheimer's, in particular.

Missy Tate: Audrey. I hope we can play that tape. But Audrey was a 82 year old woman and she had been in the nursing home for about eight years. Audrey had forgotten how to walk, how to talk, how to eat and her hair of course was matted. And she would come down to the meetings and just really people got so they ignored her except for physical situation. And I walked up to her one day with a microphone and I said, "Audrey, would you like to sing with me?" And she went, "Mm-hmm." And you hear that on the tape. And then all of a sudden she breaks into, In the Garden, "I come to the garden alone..." And the wonderful thing is, it's in beautiful harmony.

Dr. Dobson: Do you know that same thing happened to my mother. She was unable to communicate. My mother had Parkinson's disease and she had really kind of shrunk to about an 80 pound little frame. But a year before that, when the process hadn't gone quite that far, my friends, Robert and Bobby Wohlgemuth went with me to see her, and we sat on the bed and sang to her. And Robert and Bobby have great voices, and they began singing the old hymns and my mother who could not talk, did the same thing because it comes from the other side of the brain. And she sang in alto, beautiful alto, all the words in the right place-

Missy Tate: Isn't that wonderful?

Dr. Dobson: ... And I sat there and bawled like a baby. Let's hear the tape you're talking about.

Missy Tate: (singing)

Dr. Dobson: Missy, in the first place that's an emotional song. And then to have Audrey sing it with you, that must have surprised you when she chimed in there.

Missy Tate: It surprised me, but the nurses that had cared for her those eight years, they were just overwhelmed and in tears. That was amazing.

Dr. Dobson: So, what you're saying through all this is even though there's a giving relationship and you're giving your life to go into places and reach out to people who really can't give you a lot back, you do get something back, don't you?

Missy Tate: Oh my! Yes.

Dr. Dobson: Missy, this is wonderful, this is such valuable information and motivation, I hope... We have five principles that this ministry is based on and one of the five is the worth of the individual without regard to the circumstances in which life is expressed. So, those who are not productive, the rejected, the handicapped and the elderly who languish in these nursing homes are all of equal worth. We're not on a hierarchy-

Missy Tate: They have-

Dr. Dobson: ... Some aren't more valuable than others. And yet those people sit there and wait for somebody to care.

Missy Tate: In Jeremiah 8:20 says, "The summer is over, the harvest is here and we are not saved." And those are our seniors.

Dr. Dobson: This is the last opportunity for many of them, isn't it?

Missy Tate: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Dr. Dobson: And if we don't reach out, who will?

Missy Tate: That's right.

Dr. Dobson: The thought that some of those people can spend eternity in heaven because of our effort is very exciting to me. Thank you, Missy, appreciate you being with us.

Missy Tate: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, what an important discussion we have heard today from the late Missy Tate here on Family Talk. And doctor, I don't think people realize how many elderly folks really do feel abandoned in their life situations.

Dr. Dobson: And you know what I'm mindful of as we're talking about this subject, we are talking directly to a lot of people who are in that situation.

Roger Marsh: That's right.

Dr. Dobson: They're listening to the radio in a nursing home perhaps and maybe there's a little tear in the corner of the eye because somebody has articulated what they've been feeling and what they need. And if we have put an arm around them, what a great way to invest the broadcast!

Roger Marsh: Yes.

Dr. Dobson: And I want to share a scripture, a very, very familiar scripture from the words of Jesus. It's in Matthew 25:34 to 40. And we've heard this before, but let's listen again and ask ourselves if we are truly conforming to this standard that God has set for us.

He said in verse 34, "Then the King will say to those on his right hand, 'Come, you blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, and I was thirsty and you gave me drink, and I was a stranger and you took me in. I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me. And I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothed you? Or when did we see you sick or in prison and come to you?' And the king will answer to them and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, in as much as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me.'" Isn't that beautiful?

Roger Marsh: It certainly is, Doctor. And God certainly has given us a challenge through those verses and it's something we need to be mindful of. And you know what? Maybe it's not a coincidence that some of you have tuned into our broadcast today. Hopefully this discussion spurred you to call your local nursing home and schedule a visit or connect with your church and see where volunteering is needed in your community. Whatever the outreach is, just go out and be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Well, that wraps up today's broadcast, but we're not done discussing this important topic. On tomorrow's edition of Family Talk, Danae Dodson joins her dad to share her passion for ministering to the elderly. It's a lovely conversation you will not want to miss. And it's coming up next time right here on Family Talk. For Dr. James Dobson, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening and have a blessed day.

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

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Dr. Dobson:

We all know we should listen to our children and our spouses, but we should also tune in to the older folks who are around us. I was given a copy of a letter recently written by an 80 year old grandmother named Mom Keltner. And it was sent with love to her family. It surprised the members of her family who had no idea what she was thinking.

This is what this quiet lady wrote on that day. She said, "I hate having to rely on my children to do things for me that I could do for myself just a few years ago. The truth of it is that our roles are reversed now and I am your child needing you in a special way. I need your patience when I don't hear what you say the first time; so please don't be annoyed. I need your patience when I think too much about the past. I need your patience with my slowness and my set ways. I want you to be tolerant with what the years have done to me physically. And please, be understanding about my personal care habits. I really can't see when my dress is dirty or the floor needs cleaning. To sum up, time, patience and understanding are the priceless gifts that I ask for." Mom Keltner expressed so beautifully here what many elderly people wish they could tell their children. You might want to ask the older members of your family to tell you the thoughts and needs that are trapped inside.

Roger Marsh:

Hear more at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org).