



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: When God Doesn't Appear to Make Sense to Us – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. James Dobson

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and thank you for joining us for this program.

Roger Marsh: Welcome to Family Talk with your host, psychologist and best-selling author Dr. James Dobson. I'm Roger Marsh, and if you have ever found yourself wrestling with an issue that seemed to be so overwhelming and you cried out to God for help, but He didn't seem to answer in a way that brought you any comfort, well today's Family Talk broadcast is for you. Doctor?

Dr. James Dobson: We're going to talk today about the troubling times that come into the lives of most of us, I would say all of us at one time or another, and they defy explanation. We're going to discuss this topic for several days, and I hope you'll stay with it. Now, I wrote a book on this topic some years ago and I called it *When God Doesn't Make Sense*, and it's sold more than a million copies and is still available in Amazon and other places because the topic is so relevant to all of us. The theme of the book is trying to understand those experiences when we cannot figure out what God is doing and why things don't go according to plan. It happens to all of us sooner or later, as I said, and it raises theological questions that even the theologians have difficulty dealing with. And that's what I want to talk to you about today.

Now, our setting for today was a staff meeting that occurred actually back at Focus on the Family, when I was there, where we brought together these members of the staff. I would guess there were 150 people there. And I spoke candidly with them about this subject, when God doesn't make sense. And with that, we're going to let you hear what I had to say that day, and I would love to hear your thoughts when you've heard this three day presentation.

It would be really interesting this morning to take a microphone and go around this room and ask you of your own experiences with horror. Many have had children who've been sick or have been through divorce or have had physical illnesses that threatened your life, and it's part of the human experience, and it is part of the Christian experience. And I think it is extremely important to not only admit that to ourselves and to each other, but to try to understand it, hopefully before it occurs. Because I've spent 25 years or more counseling with

people and talking to people in trouble, people who are in a state of panic. And what I have discovered is that Christians especially, at a time like that, not only go through the crisis that creates the turmoil in the first place, but also an unanticipated theological crisis that is actually more painful than the disease or the loss or the sickness or whatever it is, because when those things occur, now, we know they're going to happen.

Everybody knows you're not going to get out of this life alive. We understand that. It's appointed unto man wants to die. Everybody understands that we're not going to live forever. And yet when it happens to us as it has happened to maybe five or six billion people from the foundations of the earth, since Adam and Eve, and when it happens to us, we say, "Why me?", as though we'd been singled out by God for this discomfort, as though He had selected us for some kind of unique, terrible difficulty that is not part of the human experience. Actually, what occurs in a moment like that is people come to that terrible crisis where God doesn't make sense, where they can't make the pieces fit, where you just don't know what God's doing.

And I tell you something, again, from my counseling experience, it is not the sickness, the death, the loss, the pain, the divorce, the cancer, the tornado, the flood. It's not the particular source of difficulty that causes the most stress in life. It is confusion over what's going on. See, you got soldiers in a war and they attack a machine gun nest and know they're going to die, and they do it, and they do it willingly because the cause for which their risk in their life makes sense to them. Throw their body on a hand grenade. That's not uncommon in combat, guys giving their lives. Jim Elliot, missionary, as you know was speared, he and four other missionaries to death. And he said, I believe this is a quote, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." See, he willingly put his life on the line. Why? Because it made sense to him. The problem is when you go through these things and you can't figure out what's going on. "Where is God? Why would He do this to me? Why did He allow this to happen?" And that's where the crisis really occurs and that's where the greatest stress comes from.

We had a young man at our church in Pasadena, my home church, named Chuck Fry. He was a high school student, extremely bright, very disciplined, very dedicated. Graduated near the top of his class, went on to college, and again, graduated with honors. He was just a wonderful young man, kind of the pride of the church. And Chuck Fry wanted to be a physician. That was his great desire. At the time, I was a professor at USC School of Medicine, and I knew how difficult it would be for him to get into medical school. At USC that year, we had 106 open positions and we had 6,000 applicants. So the competition was fierce. Chuck Fry competed and was granted admission to the University of Arizona Medical School, great medical school, and I'm sure that he and his family prayed about that, about this calling on his life to be a physician.

Toward the end of that year, he began to think about what he would do after he graduated from medical school. And Chuck had his priorities in order. He just

wanted to serve the Lord, and he did not want anything to do with high-tech medicine or big city power and money and all that that can mean in some medical settings, less today than 15 years ago. He wanted to get away from all that and he wanted to be a medical missionary, wanted to go to Africa and wanted to give his life to the down and outers who could not pay him, who could not reward him in return, and to try to reduce the suffering in the world. That was the man's passion. That was his desire.

He finished that first year, did well, made good grades. And in the summer between his first and second year of medical school, he began having some fatigue, didn't feel good, went to see his own physician, was diagnosed with leukemia. Chuck Fry was dead by November. Now folks, you can think about that for the rest of your life, you're not going to figure that out. You can search the Scriptures from one end to the other and you will not understand why the Lord didn't let that dedicated young man go to Africa to ease the pain of all those children and all those people who have no access to medical care, and to give his talents to them and to minister. You just think of all the people over the course of a lifetime that he could have assisted or cured or ministered to. And the main thing is he wanted to do it in the name of Christ, he wanted to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now how do you explain that? Why didn't God allow him to do it? Where was God when he felt the call to go to medical school? Where was God when he prayed that he would gain entrance in the medical school? Why did the Lord invest so much talent in a young man who is not going to be able to use it while winos and dropouts and people who don't contribute anything to society or to the kingdom sometimes live 80 or 90 years? How do you explain those things? You can't explain those things. There are some things you cannot explain.

Let me tell you the rest of the story. Chuck Fry had met a young lady named Karen Ernst who was also in our church, and they fell in love and they were planning to get married. And when the diagnosis of leukemia came about, Karen loved him so much that she married him anyway, knowing that she was going to lose him. And when he died in November, Karen took his place in medical school for the purpose of going to Africa. She completed her medical training and just recently returned from a five-year stint as a medical missionary in Swaziland. Why'd the Lord not let him go with her? You don't know. There are times when God appears not to make sense. My book probably should have been written that way. It probably should have said, "Hold onto your faith when God appears not to make sense." God always makes sense, but He doesn't always make sense to us.

Some of you know Dr. and Mrs. Jerry White. Dr. White is the president of Navigators. A year before we came to Colorado Springs, his son Steve was here in town, and Steve White had been off to college and he came home and he was anxious to get into broadcasting. And while he was waiting, he was driving a taxi cab to support himself and his family. And one night, a deranged person in this town, a man for reasons that may never be known for sure decided to kill

somebody, anybody. There is some suspicion that he did this out of anger at God and wanted to get back at him and was willing to kill somebody just to wound God, if God loves people. And so he dialed a number for a taxi cab, and whoever came, he was going to kill. It was Steve White. And he came and shot him in the back of the head and killed him. Now, this is a godly family, folks. The Whites have given their lives to the Lord, heading up one of the most effective ministries in the United States. That's not supposed to happen to those kinds of people. It was random. Could have been any one of the taxi drivers in this town. But it happens like that.

I, having been on a faculty of a children's hospital for a long time, I'm very, very vulnerable to children who suffer. Even while I was there, I had difficulty going into the oncology ward and going into the places where children were dying because I was just too vulnerable. I just loved kids and it was just really hard for me to deal with that. And some of those kids that were there will be on my mind forever.

But we received a letter from a father about his little girl, and this is what he wrote. He said, "My dear Bristol, before you were born, I prayed for you. Interesting place to begin considering what came. In my heart, I knew you would be a little angel, and so you were. When you were born on my birthday, April 7th, it was evident that you were a special gift from the Lord, but how profound a gift you turned out to be. More than the beautiful bundle of gurgles and rosy cheeks. More than the firstborn of my flesh, a joy unspeakable. You showed me God's love more than anything else in all creation, Bristol, you taught me how to love. I certainly loved you when you were cuddly and cute, when you rolled over and sat up and jabbered your first words. I loved you when the searing pain of realization took hold that something was wrong, that maybe you were not developing as quickly as your peers. And then when we understood it was more serious than that, I loved you when we went from hospital to clinic to doctor looking for a medical diagnosis that would bring us some hope."

"And of course we always prayed for you, and prayed and prayed. I loved you when one of the tests resulted in too much spinal fluid being drawn from your body and you screamed. I loved you when you moaned and cried, when your mom and I and your sisters would drive for hours late at night to help you fall asleep. I loved you with tears in my eyes when confused, you would bite your fingers or your lip by accident, and when your eyes crossed and then went blind. I most certainly loved you when you could no longer speak, but how profoundly I missed your voice. I loved you when your scoliosis started wrenching your body like a pretzel and we put a tube in your stomach so you could eat because you were choking on your food, which we fed you one spoon fill at a time for up to two hours per meal. I managed to love you when your contorted limbs would not allow ease of changing messy diapers, so many diapers, 10 years of diapers, Bristol, I even loved you when you could not say the one thing in life that I long to hear back, 'Daddy, I love you.'"

"Bristol, I loved you when I was close to God and when He seemed far away, when I was full of faith and also when I was angry at Him. And the reason I loved you, my Bristol, in spite of these difficulties is that God put this love in my heart. This is the wondrous nature of God's love, that He loves us even when we're blind or deaf or twisted in body or in spirit. God loves us even when we can't tell Him back that we love Him. My dear Bristol, now you are free. I look forward to that day, according to God's promises, when we will be joined together with you, with the Lord, completely whole and full of joy. I'm so happy that you have your crown first. We will follow you someday, in His time. Before you were born, I prayed for you. In my heart, I knew that you would be a little angel, and so you were. Love, daddy."

My heart goes out to that father. He prayed for her before she was born. How does he explain that? As I was writing this book, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*, I came under the influence of Dr. R.T. Kendall in London who had a great impact on me. The book is dedicated to him. And he said that in moments like we have just read about that many people encounter what he calls the betrayal barrier. You come up to a point like that, and because of a theological misunderstanding and a tragic misinterpretation of a Scripture, a person feels abandoned by God, rejected by him, hated by him, and misunderstood by Him. And at the time that you need him the most and the time that you're going through the greatest agony, He seems a long ways away and distant. And Dr. Kendall said that of the people he has talked to, he estimates sooner or later, sometime in life, 100% of us will hit the betrayal barrier and only about 10% will recover from it. And that those people go through the rest of their lives, it doesn't mean they're not Christians, it doesn't mean God doesn't love them, it doesn't mean they aren't in his service. But it means there's scar tissue there, and there's a wound there, and there's a feeling of not understanding and a feeling of rejection.

Now, see folks, what bothers me is that if this is true, and I fully believe it is, then we ought to tell young Christians about it. But instead we often give them the other message. One of my favorite ministries in the world is Campus Crusade for Christ. They're doing wonderful things. So this is not a slur or any kind of derogatory statement about Campus Crusade, but you know the little booklet that they distribute called the Four Spiritual Laws? What's the first of the four spiritual laws? God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Now, that is absolutely true because anything consistent with God's will is a wonderful plan. If it's in His will, it's going to be right. But what does that imply? It implies you're going to understand the plan, and it implies you're going to like the plan. For Joni Eareckson Tada, the plan meant sitting in a wheelchair as a quadriplegic from the teen years on. For Bristol, it meant an early death. And Bristol's father, it meant unspeakable agony.

See, it is a wonderful plan. Please understand me. And talking about this is very important to recognize how God feels about us. The Scripture is full of statements about His love for us, His tenderness for us. He hurts when we hurt. He feels what we feel. He's there reaching out to us. He's a friend that sticks closer than a brother. All of those things are true. But it is also true that the Lord

allows us, for reasons that are partially clear but maybe not entirely clear. Paul says we see through a dark glass, we're never going to fully understand till we get on the other side. But for reasons that we don't fully comprehend, He allows us to go through these times where we can't figure out what he's doing. It is universal in a Christian life. If it hasn't happened to you yet, it's going to. And when it does, don't panic. God is still there whether you feel anything or not. And unless you understand that, you're not prepared for it.

See, the problem is one of expectations. It's what you anticipate and what you expect. If you're led to believe God will jump through hoops when you get to a difficulty, and even if you do go through a hard time, He will explain it to you immediately and perhaps apologize for it, if you believe that, disillusionment is really not very far behind. And it's really dangerous to not understand. Now, Scripture is absolutely clear on this subject. I have spent more time researching *When God Doesn't Make Sense* than all the other books I've written combined. And it's had a tremendous impact on me personally. I have grown, my faith has grown as a result of this study.

Well, I'm James Dobson, and you've been listening to a lesson that I taught to the staff of Focus on the Family when I was president. And that was shortly after I wrote and published a then new book called *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. And we are just getting started with this theme. I hope you'll be with us for this entire series, because to really understand the times when the wise of life become urgent, and they blast into our Christian experience, and we have to prepare ourselves for them because they are part of the Christian life. You will not nail down all the answers to the why's that come into your life. You just will not, and to force them into tidy little platitudes will paint yourself in a corner. For example, when a child dies, some people will try to explain that away by saying that God wanted that little boy or girl in His garden. That's nonsense. That's foolish. The Lord doesn't deprive a mother or father of a precious child for His selfish purposes. You're trying to force an explanation that doesn't fit. So why do some children die? The answer to that question is we don't know. We have to live with unanswered questions. And what the Lord says to us in moments like these is, "Trust me."

Roger Marsh:

Well, I hope you'll join us again tomorrow, and then again on Thursday for the remainder of this three-part series here on Family Talk. And remember, you can find Dr. Dobson's book, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*, available on our website at drjamesdobson.org. We'll be happy to send you a copy. It's our way of thanking you for a suggested donation of just \$20. This is a great resource to help you or a friend or family member work through a difficult time in your life. Now, if it's easier, give us a call at 877-732-6825, and a member of our trained customer care team will be happy to walk you through the process anytime Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM Mountain Time. When you call, you can also ask about additional resources as well. And keep in mind, our team will be happy to pray with and for you. Again, that number to call is 877-732-6825.

The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is a listener supported ministry. Because of your prayers and faithful financial support, we will soon be announcing a new initiative for you on how you can get involved with and come alongside us to support expectant parents, young families, and mothers in need. Together we can make a difference and stand up for the pre-born. I'm Roger Marsh. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for part two of our discussion about what happens when God doesn't make sense. That's coming your way right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. And remember, God loves you. Have a blessed day.

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

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hi everyone. This is Dr. Tim Clinton here for Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. The news comes in all kinds of shapes, sizes, and formats these days, but how do you cut through the noise and get to the heart of the matters that affect your family? Come to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and sign up for Dr. Dobson's monthly newsletter. You'll find clarity on tough issues, encouragement for your everyday life, and trusted principles to help you build strong, healthy, connected families. Go to drjamesdobson.org. Sign up today. That's drjamesdobson.org.

Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone. This is James Dobson, inviting you to join us for our next edition of Family Talk. Every day we come to these microphones with someone in mind, whether it's a busy mom looking for tips on discipline, or a husband who wants to learn more about connecting with his wife. We want to put an arm around your family in any way that we can. So join us next time for Family Talk, won't you?