



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Confronting Guilt in Motherhood – Part 1

Guest(s): Julie Barnhill

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. You know, no parent is perfect and moms especially have many responsibilities beyond taking care of the kids. Many women struggle with the guilt of balancing it all and juggling many responsibilities and commitments, such as making sure their kids have healthy meals, helping out at their school and church, staying on top of their own health, keeping their houses clean, spending time with friends and family, connecting with their spouse, planning for the holidays, and the list goes on and on and on. Now, this remorse isn't just felt by moms. It is definitely something dads and caregivers battle with as well. But when it comes to guilt or mom guilt, women definitely have the brunt of that responsibility. So who better to discuss the topic of guilt and mom guilt than our special guest today, Julie Barnhill. She'll sit down with our own Dr. James Dobson to discuss this multifaceted topic.

So be sure to stay with us. We've got so much material to cover. This topic will be extended over the next three days in this classic series. Julie Barnhill is an international speaker and the author of over 10 books. She's a former columnist with articles that were featured in the *Wall Street Journal* and *LifeWay Magazine*. Julie is married to her husband, Rick. Together they have three grown children and a growing number of grandchildren. So sit back and enjoy today's conversation with our guest, Julie Barnhill and our own Dr. James Dobson on this classic edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Julie, guilt and motherhood just go hand in glove, don't they?

Julie Barnhill: They really do. And it just follows up to once you deal with that anger as a mother and you deal with some of those issues, what's left a lot of times? The guilt.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, you wrote in the book that guilt in mothers is second only to anger as a source of angst.

Julie Barnhill: Absolutely. This weight that dominates our lives, oftentimes as mothers from the time they're... Even before conception. I remember reading an article about folic acid and how important that was, and I could not swallow those, they like the size of a man's big toe. I mean, you just can't swallow those things.

Dr. James Dobson: Not quite.

Julie Barnhill: No, no, no, no. But I could not get those things down, and I just thought I went for a sonogram and I was so concerned that her development was moving the way it should because I thought I didn't take those pills, and she was the size of a lima bean and I already had guilt. So it's definitely something that we pick up as moms.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, you are not just giving your opinion about this, but you surveyed 850 women about this subject.

Julie Barnhill: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: What did you hear?

Julie Barnhill: Well, it was probably even more than that. I spoke for about 18 months and everywhere I spoke, and I'd speak to audiences as large as about 6,000 at one time, and every one of them would get a piece of paper and I'd say, take this back to your room and bring it back when you've had a little time to think about it. And I asked, what are the things you did right? What are the things that you regret? And just all sorts of questions and gathered all that information and tabulated it. And it finds out from age 20 moms to age, I think the oldest woman that responded was 87 years old, have guilt. 87 years old, and I thought...

Dr. James Dobson: She still felt this sense of failure.

Julie Barnhill: Her son was 56 years old and some felt guilty about something that happened when he was three years old. And I thought, my word, how long do you have to carry it? And really wanted to write a book about guilt with humor, practicality, realness, authenticity, and let you know you're not alone.

Dr. James Dobson: Men feel guilt too, but a different kind and over different issues. What makes women so vulnerable to feelings of guilt?

Julie Barnhill: I think part of it's just our chromosome makeup, the relational load of that in the family. So I think part of it's our chromosome, part of it's just how we react to one another as women, as mothers. Your daughter-in-law's going to come across this. Is Lincoln potty-trained yet? Oh, no.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, no.

Julie Barnhill: Well, little junior was potty-trained.

Dr. James Dobson: You're really kind of late, aren't you? My goodness.

Julie Barnhill: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: What have you done about that?

Julie Barnhill: Exactly. So I feel guilty, I should have him potty-trained and they shouldn't have the pacifier and it should be nuked in the microwave, so it's sterile. And so I think part of it's us.

Dr. James Dobson: You know the best answer to that? The best answer is that have you ever seen an adult who wasn't potty-trained?

Julie Barnhill: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: Eventually it's going to happen. Don't get excited about it.

Julie Barnhill: But boy, with that first one, it's hard to let go of that. So I think part of it is our chromosome, our culture, of course, the pressure to do it all and do it all well and effectively. And that's within our Christian culture, Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: If it really is in the feminine nature to be vulnerable to guilt, then it's not just a cultural thing. It's not just in the West, it's probably all around the world.

Julie Barnhill: Right. And good point. And I think part of the relational is that part of our nature is to fix things. I think that we want those relationships tight. And then I think part of it is just how we are with women and with other moms, and we're not very gracious sometimes and we're definitely not very gracious with ourselves. Have lots of expectations.

Dr. James Dobson: Was your choice of this topic to speak and write about introspective? I mean, you want to give us a little honesty here. Are you dealing with or have you dealt with your own guilt and if so, over what?

Julie Barnhill: Oh, you want all the details.

Dr. James Dobson: I want it.

Julie Barnhill: You know what? I said this in the book. In fact, I have a chapter, "my guilt list," and I said, if you're anything like me, that's the first chapter. You skipped the prologue and all that. And you went right to this because if I was a listener right now, I'd want to know one of three things. First, does this woman have children? The second is what's her relationship like now with her children? Have they all taken off and don't have anything to do with her? And the third one is did you struggle with it? And don't give me a bunch of elusive, well, I felt kind of guilty about, so I'll give you some of my guilt list. And it's from the sublime to

the really serious. I took money from my children, they get birthday money and we'd be short in cash around the house.

Dr. James Dobson: You didn't?

Julie Barnhill: I did. Well, Kristen, the firstborn got wise about age seven and started putting her money in a Ziploc bag and hiding it around the house. So I felt guilty about that. I had Ricky Neal the second one, 18 months after we had Kristen. So of course I had guilt there with, I didn't spend as much time with him. I was much quicker to give him a bottle and prop it. I know you're not supposed to do that, but I did it, so I could get a little rest. I've had a lot of guilt for my anger.

Dr. James Dobson: And when she feels guilty, she blows.

Julie Barnhill: Absolutely. It's a vicious cycle.

Dr. James Dobson: Those are very much related, aren't they?

Julie Barnhill: Very much so. I like for moms to say what they've done right and that's actually how the book opens is what I've done right. And what's funny, if I asked some of these moms, what are three things that you absolutely don't feel guilty about as a mom? They would look at me like I just nominated their kid for the ugly baby contest of the year. But if I said, what are three things you feel guilty about? 1, 2, 3.

Dr. James Dobson: They know them.

Julie Barnhill: Absolutely. So it's imperative because it's truth, because we've done innumerable things right. And we lose that in the midst of the guilt. Start with one. And it can be as simple as I gave them food. That was good. I did that right. I said, I love you a million times yesterday. Whatever those things are, moms need to speak that to themselves because it's true.

Dr. James Dobson: How about I poured my heart and soul into my children?

Julie Barnhill: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: And I was not perfect. I didn't always do it right. I wish I could go back and do it again in many ways, but I can't change one single day. And I gave it the best shot I had and I asked the Lord to help me, and somehow He helped me overcome and help them overcome my own shortcomings.

Julie Barnhill: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: I tell you, you cannot do the job perfectly.

Julie Barnhill: No.

Dr. James Dobson: You can no more be a perfect parent than you can be a perfect human being.

Julie Barnhill: We do well with pictures like a word picture. So I liken this guilt to, you've got the little mountain range here in Colorado Springs and instead of the Colorado Rockies, it would be Guiltmore National Park, this national mountain park. And instead of Pikes Peak and some of these other peaks, you have Mount Shoulda and Mount Woulda, Mount Coulda, Mount Inconsistency.

Dr. James Dobson: And Mount Unimaginable. Let's work our way through those.

Julie Barnhill: Yes. Okay.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. The first one is Mount Shoulda. Explain that.

Julie Barnhill: Well, all the things we should have done before, during and after mothering. And I mean the tentacles go everywhere. You have a child and it brings your relationship with your husband under a microscope and you think, I should have thought about some of these things about this man, and I should have really considered the in-laws a little bit more, just kidding. But we go to all these places, so it's the shoulda's of our mothering. I should have... You know what a huge one is Dr. Dobson? I should have prayed more.

Because I speak a lot, 50/50 to Christian and secular events. But in those Christian events, when I speak about guilt, that is priority one. And my question has been, gosh, is there a magic number? Is there a magic number that I should have prayed? 1006 times and that would've taken care of...

Dr. James Dobson: And does the Lord have a timer there where he said sorry?

Julie Barnhill: Right. You missed it. Exactly. And what a weight that is. You and I were talking a little bit before the show that it really is about freedom. It really is about truth and only God, only the Holy Spirit can really reveal that truth that changes our hearts and our minds and how we think about guilt. And that is priority one.

Dr. James Dobson: Julie, we hear a lot these days about the homeschools movement, and I think a lot of women feel guilty because they haven't been willing to do that and it was never intended. Certainly our broadcast has never been intended to make anybody feel guilty if they could not in their circumstances go in that direction. And yet I think a lot of women feel I should have.

Julie Barnhill: Boy, you hit a big one. We homeschooled for three and a half years and Kristen and Ricky would've been about second grade through sixth grade. And I had lots of guilt when I homeschooled even because even within the homeschooling, it's kind of like they need to excel. It's not enough just to be ordinary at this level because I'm doing this full time I need to excel at that. It goes back kind of what I mentioned before about that power we have as women to really alleviate a lot of the guilt that one another carries. A lot of moms get in discussions and talk

about these things. And if this isn't the time for you to homeschool or you choose not to for whatever circumstances, God is bigger than all of that. And we can trust in that, which is something we talk about.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, related to the homeschool situation, is the guilt that many women feel overworking outside the home, being formally employed, I should have stayed home. And interestingly, some of those that stay home say I should have helped with the finances to the... You can't win. I mean, it's a situation where everybody looks at themselves and says, I'm inadequate.

Julie Barnhill: And it's such a vicious cycle. And the 87 year old woman I mentioned, that's what her guilt was. She said that when her son was three, and that would've been, help me with the math, when that would've been, but she had to go to work. And that was definitely a time period when women didn't work. And she said, I wish we'd had the money to... I could have stayed home with him.

Dr. James Dobson: We're talking to Julie Ann Barnhill who has written *Motherhood: The Guilt That Keeps On Giving*, talking about the pervasiveness of guilt and the difficulty of dealing with it. And some women are far more vulnerable to it than others. In fact, Julie, you said something in this book that really rings true, having to do with low self-esteem and a sense of inadequacy. The more you tend to doubt yourself as a person, the more you feel if they really knew me, they wouldn't like me anyway. And that is so common. I wrote a book called *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women* and the number one source of depression was low self-esteem. This feeling that I'm inadequate. Well, the more you feel like that, the more vulnerable you are to those little voices that whisper in your ear and say, "You messed it up, didn't you? You really not good enough."

Julie Barnhill: It just spirals deeper and deeper. What you're mentioning and talking about is really defining that guilt. And I just go to Webster's for definitions and one of them is a violation of a law. I go speeding through town here, 65 in a 35, I get a ticket, I'm guilty. And then the other definition is where I think the majority of us women fall as moms, and that is, it's those feelings of culpability or a sense of inadequacy, and that's like nailing Jello to a wall. I mean, there's nothing specific about that when it comes to guilt. It's just vague and cloudy, but I just feel this way.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Well along that same line, you talk in the book about true guilt versus false guilt. Lay that out for us.

Julie Barnhill: Well, I like short and simple. I'm a short and simple girl. And Mary Whelchel, actually, I read this in a book that she had written and I thought that absolutely nails it. True guilt is specific. It's specific. You know what you did wrong. And now you may have to think about this a little bit. I call it taking back your brain. So you may have to ask some questions and examine some things, but when it comes down to it, you know what you did wrong. And if you ask yourself, how do I fix this? Or what do I need to do to change this? You know what to do. False

guilt is again that elusive, vague, cloudy, really feeling rather than a fact. And we really have to examine that and look at that. And I think if we'll take the time...

And this is why in conferences, I will tell women one guilt that you have because we want to list all of them. But you pick the one guilt that you have. And let's just ask this question, do you know what you did wrong? Do you know why you feel guilty about this? If the answer's yes, write that down. Do you know what you need to do in order to change this, to fix this? Write that down. The enemy of our soul, the enemy of our family loves to make his bed in generalities. And I have found that the Holy Spirit is very specific. He doesn't put a carrot in front of you and snatch it away. You know exactly what you need to deal with and we can trust that.

Dr. James Dobson: We have been talking here about guilt with children exclusively, but we feel guilty about everything, especially guilt before God. And there is true guilt and there's false guilt before Him too.

Julie Barnhill: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Some people feel like they have to earn their salvation every day. If they're not out on a street corner someplace preaching and passing out tracks, they somehow feel they have not been worthy of this Christ who died for us. And in fact, He came not because of what we do, but because of His love for us. So there are other kinds of guilt that we deal with.

Julie Barnhill: Absolutely. And that's good guilt. And that's the thing with this motherhood guilt. I mean, we don't wipe guilt completely away. And this is why I say it's not like we get rid of guilt. That's not the purpose of this program. That after listening to it, you never, never have guilt again. Because some guilt is necessary for your development with the Father, with God the Father, and also within your relationship because you mess up. But it's going to be specific. And I think another word that comes to me, Dr. Dobson, is just this whole thing of grace, this scandalous grace. And it really, it's just an affront to religion and all the dos and don'ts. That here's a God that says, I know you mess up. I knew you were going to mess up before I ever created you, and that's why you need me.

Dr. James Dobson: Now here's where it really gets difficult because some guilt is valid, some guilt is a motivator and should be, some guilt means the Lord is saying you've got to do better about that. And some guilt comes from doing a really, really sloppy job with children and causing them harm. And the issue is how are we going to deal with it in a situation like that? You said a minute ago that some guilt is good. I think of Peter after denying Christ the night before Christ was put on the cross, and he denied him three times, one of his closest disciples and associates. And what did he do? He turned his back on Christ and went out and wept bitterly. That is repentance. That was good that he did that. He knew that he was wrong and he admitted it before God and wept bitterly. So the situation is knowing which guilt is valid and dealing with it and getting forgiveness for it and getting

beyond it as opposed to this guilt that is just nagging at you and there's nothing you can do to get rid of it.

Roger Marsh:

Well, that's a truthful principle for all parents to remember indeed. And it is important to distinguish between the nudging of the Holy Spirit and the nagging of the devil. You're listening to Family Talk and a great conversation Dr. James Dobson had with author and speaker Julie Barnhill. Now, before we return to today's broadcast, I'd like to remind you that Family Talk is a listener supported ministry. We survive on your tax-deductible financial contributions. So if you're able to donate to Family Talk, remember you can call us toll-free at 877-732-6825. You can also make a donation online through our secure website at drjamesdobson.org. We are extremely grateful for your prayers and thankful for your financial generosity. Okay, now let's rejoin today's lively broadcast right now. We'll pick it up with Dr. James Dobson and author Julie Barnhill discussing the role that husbands have in helping their wives process real guilt and false guilt.

Julie Barnhill:

Well, I'm thinking about my relationship with my husband and all of this, and I'm finally learning to listen to him a little bit. It's been tough for me and there's probably some women out there like me who I used to always say, I can't help it that I'm usually right. But I've kind of learned the hard way I need to listen to him. And there are some times when Rick does say to me, Julie, get over it. And I've needed to hear that. I mean, there has been some guilt that it wasn't true guilt or maybe it was true and I acknowledged it, I confessed it. I asked forgiveness and I was making amends. And he's like, all right, move on, sweetheart. And I needed to hear that, needed someone to tell me to move on. And another part of it is just, I don't know, let us work it out.

Let us talk it out with you. And I know that's very painful. My husband and I drove seven and a half hours to an event in Minneapolis called A Revival, seven and a half hours there and seven and a half hours back. And at one point I kind of looked at him and he had this kind of glazed look. I'm like, are you tired of talking? He's like, no, not really. But just to listen to us, to alleviate some of those guilt, some of those guilts can be alleviated by you stepping in, spending some time with the kids or helping out in the household chores and your words of saying, you know what? I don't expect you to do this and that because part of this, Dr. Dobson is that I call it Mount Immaculate Perfection, this peak that we think we can do it all right. And it's a lie and it's killing us in our souls and in our home.

Dr. James Dobson:

So the middle ground is examine the guilt that's there, decide if it's valid, and if it's valid, you take it to the Lord and ask for his forgiveness and maybe talk it out with those who love you, those closest to you, and then put it aside. Because you can't change it.

Julie Barnhill:

Hey, you should write a book.

Dr. James Dobson:

I did.

Julie Barnhill: You're good at that.

Dr. James Dobson: It's called *Emotions: Can You Trust Them?* But it's not the...

Julie Barnhill: You nailed it. I mean, and that's it. And that's the difficult part is just dropping it and moving on because we kind of want to circle back to that, those little voices that whisper to us at times.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we want to do another program with you, Julie, and we'll start at that point because the question is how? We're talking to an awful lot of women especially, but women and men who are plagued by guilt, it's there. They can't get away from it. It's almost compulsive in their response to it, but they don't have a clue as to how to deal with it. It's not enough to just say, I'm not going to feel guilty about that anymore. That doesn't work. And you have offered some suggestions in this book for how to do that. The title of the book is *Motherhood: The Guilt That Keeps On Giving*. It's a funny woman sitting here at the top of Mount Guiltmore. And the book, again, is very, very practical. It deals with the kind of things that I think every mother who's sensitive at all is going to have experienced. Now, Julie, there is one little problem in this book, and I don't mean to embarrass you, but you make reference to Austin Powers in here a couple of times, and that was a wretched movie.

Julie Barnhill: Yes, it was.

Dr. James Dobson: And you raised that and said something about it being funny. That's the only thing in the book that I've found that makes me uncomfortable with it. So let's just go ahead and make the book available. Everything else is great. Just don't read that paragraph.

Julie Barnhill: Can I explain myself?

Dr. James Dobson: Sure you can. Yes.

Julie Barnhill: All right. Well, it's actually in my guilt list. What I feel guilty for and the first guilt is that I feel guilty because my children can quote portions of the Austin Power movie. And then my second guilt after that is I feel guilty because I've laughed at that and it's kind of interesting. I was talking to the producer about this and I said, this is perfect and I'm glad you brought it up because hence another guilt. We try to keep all that crud at bay. We do our best to put up our borders and our parameters and all that. And yet it seems to insidiously find its way into our heart and home.

Dr. James Dobson: Comes in under the door.

Julie Barnhill: And I'm like, do you not understand? I'm going on Dr. Dobson's show. You can't be quoting Austin Powers. And I hope it gives hope to other moms because we

do... You have this ideal and how you want it to be and the stuff that you do allow into your homes.

Dr. James Dobson: Did I just make you feel guilty?

Julie Barnhill: No, you did not.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, it is a good book, Julie. You've done a great job and I hope a lot of our listeners will write for a copy. We'll pick up right here next time.

Julie Barnhill: As always, it's a pleasure.

Roger Marsh: Wow, what an open and honest conversation about the challenges of overcoming parental guilt with our guest, Julie Barnhill and our own Dr. James Dobson here on Family Talk. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for part two of this classic three-part series. And if you missed any part of today's program, just visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And if you're a parent of an extra effort child, we like to call them strong-willed. Consider signing up for the free new 10 day email series based on Dr. Dobson's best-selling book called *The New Strong-Willed Child*. This series is designed to equip you to wisely lead your kids through even the toughest of trials. I mentioned there's no cost involved. All you have to do to start receiving it is to sign up when you go to our website at drjamesdobson.org/strongwilledchild. Well, thanks so much for joining us today here on Family Talk, and may God continue to richly bless you and your family. I'm Roger Marsh, inviting you to join us again tomorrow for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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