



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** My Wynter Season – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Jonathan Pitts

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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.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, your host. Today, we have a very special guest, so I want to get started right away. Jonathan Pitts is a Christian author, speaker, and executive pastor at Church of the City in Franklin, Tennessee. Prior to pastoring, he was executive director of the Urban Alternative, the national ministry of Dr. Tony Evans in Dallas, Texas.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan, and his wife, Wynter, co-wrote *Emptied: Experiencing the Fullness of a Poured-Out Marriage*, and *She Is Yours: Trusting God as You Raise the Girl He Gave You*. Jonathan also serves as president of the ministry he and Wynter founded together called *For Girls Like You*. It's a nonprofit organization featuring a magazine and resources for girls that grew out of Wynter's desire to empower and equip their own daughters to be who God created them to be. And to provide parents with the resources and services needed to raise strong Christ followers.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan has been featured on the 700 Club, and Christian Parenting Magazine on the FamilyLife Podcast Network, and in many other outlets. Jonathan lives in Franklin, Tennessee with his four daughters, Elena, Kaitlin, Cameron, and Olivia. Jonathan, thank you for joining us here on Family Talk.
- Jonathan Pitts: I'm glad to be with you, Tim.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan is a dear friend of this ministry. We always enjoy catching up because he's so busy doing the Lord's work, grass doesn't grow under his feet at all. Well, as many of you know, if you follow us on radio or social media, or if you follow Dr. Tony Evans. His daughter, Priscilla, Jonathan Evans, anyone in that amazing family, you know that God sometimes doesn't make sense.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: In the summer of 2018, the unimaginable happened to Jonathan Pitts and his dear family. His wife, Wynter, was called home to be in heaven. Wynter's sudden death was a shock, but the grace and strength that Jonathan

demonstrated almost immediately upon facing the pain, the disbelief, the massive loss, then grief, to keep his family together. It was really a tribute to her. A tribute to Wynter, and that has led him to write this book My Wynter Season.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That's what we're here to talk about today. As we get started Jonathan, 2020, what a wild, insane year that was. Thank God that's over with, but how are you and the kids doing?

Jonathan Pitts: We're doing good, man. It was an insane year here in Franklin, Tennessee. With 2020 came a lot more grief in our life, honestly, then also a lot of blessings. It was a year that we'll never forget that's for certain.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The last time you were at Family Talk, I think was in the summer of 2017. The whole family was there including Wynter, your four daughters. Dr. Dobson interviewed everybody, and I mean everybody. You, Wynter, and the kids.

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah, that was an amazing time. Actually, that was a two week, summer vacation for us in Colorado. We went to Aspen Snowmass. We came to Colorado Springs, interviewed, spent some time with them, even outside of that, which was really beautiful on the 4th of July.

Jonathan Pitts: Gosh, I've remembered that summer as an epic summer. A gift from God before we'd lose Wynter the next summer, which I just thought about it as we started this conversation. It's kind of bringing back some really beautiful memories.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. A lot has happened, obviously since then. We're here to talk about you, and Wynter, and that journey that you've been on. Jonathan, you published a new book. It's called My Wynter Season: Seeing God's Faithfulness in the Shadow of Grief. It's a beautiful work, a tribute to your wife, Wynter, and the impact that she left. Really, it's about God's faithfulness and his goodness. Jonathan, if you don't mind, can we go back to the day that Wynter died?

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah. Well, just to go a little bit higher than the day itself, we were just in a massive transition in our lives. We'd been in Dallas for 14 years. Moved to Dallas from New Jersey where we got married and spent a year in New Jersey. We were in Dallas 14 years. I worked with Dr. Tony Evans for 10 of those years. I was currently running the Urban Alternative, his national ministry, which I had done for the last seven.

Jonathan Pitts: It was a gift to work with him so closely. Wynter she had launched a magazine For Girls Like You and her publishing career was kind of well on its way. We just felt this call from God to move to Nashville. I'd been offered a role as an executive pastor for a church, Church of the City here in Nashville, which is a church that I would say is influencing influencers.

Jonathan Pitts: Just felt like that was the next step for me to grow. We actually had bought our house in Franklin, Tennessee. Gotten our girls enrolled in school just that week before. We closed on our house on July 14th, 2018. Got our girls in school that week. We went on vacation for a week, and we found ourselves back in Dallas for my last week of work.

Jonathan Pitts: So it's July 24th, 2018. It was the Tuesday of that last week. I was just saying goodbye to my staff and all that. I was at work, and saying goodbye to people, policy and procedures, all the things I was trying to get ready for my departure. Wynter texted me from her cousin, Priscilla Shirer, from her house. She had a guest house on our ministry property and she said, "I feel" and put the sick emoji.

Jonathan Pitts: So I feel sick and I replied and said, "What's going on?" and she never responded back, so I just continued on with work. That was probably around noon or so. She'd also told me, "I need you to be on tonight. I got to get this final book project," she had due. It's a prayer book for girls. I carried on with my day as God would have it. The marriage book we were working on, called Emptied, the last thing I would do before leaving the office is sign the final edited manuscript and would email that to our publisher.

Jonathan Pitts: I drive home. I stopped at Costco on the way home got ribs, Caesar salad, which I'll never eat again in my life, and drove on to Priscilla's guest house. I walked in thinking Wynter was going to be sick, tired, overwhelmed from a book deadline. I mean, you know how that goes, Tim, just all the feelings. I walked in and she was sitting on the couch with my sister-in-law, her brother's wife, and my three daughters were on the sectional couch, this L-shaped couch.

Jonathan Pitts: Her two daughters were there, and they're just playing this game. And I'm like, "Oh, everything's okay." And I was like, "Hey, I'm going to go lay down." I laid down for about 15 minutes, got up after this power nap, and went into the living room. As I was coming in, my sister-in-law was leaving. They were transitioning out and I knew I was going to get dinner ready. Wynter said, "I'm going to go lay down." She went and laid down, and I went and fixed dinner. I peeked my head in the bedroom and she was laying down. About 15 minutes later she said, "I think I just need to rest longer." I was like, "Okay."

Jonathan Pitts: I finished dinner with the girls. Costco ribs, I had ribs all in my teeth and I was like, "I'm going to go floss my teeth." I went into the master where she was sleeping, she's still laying down, went and flossed my teeth. As I'm flossing, I kind of peeked out of the bathroom. I was walking around, peeked out of the bathroom, and Wynter was sitting up in the bed and she just kind of made this movement. She made this sudden kind of... she fell over almost like that lazy, "I don't want to get out of the bed," fall over movement, but something about it was awkward.

Jonathan Pitts: I was like, "Why are you playing like that?" But as soon as I said those words, I knew something was wrong. Long story short, I thought she was having a

seizure. I just began to pat her face, "Stay with me, babe, stay with me." For the next 20... it's hard to tell, 20, 30 minutes I tried to save her life CPR. She never was with me, never came back. What I thought was a seizure was actually cardiac dysrhythmia. Her heart had gotten off rhythm, which means oxygen would have stopped going to her brain. What was the most traumatic 30 minutes of my life was the 30 minutes where she would enter in the arms of Jesus. My three youngest girls were there. I'm so glad my oldest daughter wasn't there because she was 14 at the time, and would have probably had it seared in her memory like I have it in mine, in a way that maybe my younger girls won't have it.

Jonathan Pitts: Wynter had what's called mitral valve prolapse, which is a leaky heart valve. She also had a blood clotting disorder called Factor V Leiden, which she had thicker blood than most people. I thought she had a blood clot. Maybe it passed through her heart. They call it the widow maker. It wasn't the case. Actually, it was just her murmur, which 15% of the population have murmurs, somehow, some way, caused this dysrhythmia and awful, painful, dark day.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan, when people experience sudden loss, every type of loss is horrible. A sudden loss brings its own unique trauma because it's gone, just gone. No preparation, no nothing. You talked about your experience of those 30 minutes and how it's seared into your mind, your brain. Jonathan, what's it been like for you to process that?

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah, it's interesting because honestly, the first couple of weeks, I just felt a lot of guilt. I'm an Eagle Scout, Boy Scout, Eagle Scout. Took CPR trainings over and over again, and I'm like on the human side, could I have saved your life? On the spiritual side, did I not pray hard enough? Did I not have enough faith? All those thoughts are going through my head, and I actually would meet with a counselor in that first week because I felt so much guilt over that. Then also, there's another weird guilt I had.

Jonathan Pitts: I did have this sense of accomplishment, oddly enough. The only way I can think about it now is you take these vows when you get married till death do us part, and I meant those words. So when death did part us, there was this sense of accomplishment. We weren't perfect, but we made it. The amount of time we had, we made it. I had both those thoughts going through my head at the same time. I was in a counselor's office and I don't know what to do with any of these thoughts. Counseling was one way I processed it, but interestingly enough, I look back at it now I'm so thankful for the word of God.

Jonathan Pitts: I'm so thankful for the truth of God's word because ultimately, how I processed it was taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Not perfectly, but as often as I could, I take those thoughts captive. So when I thought could I have saved her life? The Bible talks about every day we have are numbered by God. Every hair on our head is numbered. God's numbered our days. Teach us to number our days. There was this truth that was fighting against, whether it be human initiated or satanically initiated, thoughts that I had. There were all these

thoughts I had and the word of God stood against every one of them. It sounds kind of cliché, but it was real to me in those moments. God's word was all I had that gave me real truth to lean into.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan, in your book, *My Wynter Season*, you write about Wynter and she was quite a lady. Do you mind telling us a little bit about your love story together, how you met, and what was so unique about Wynter?

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah, it's funny because she's almost been like a... I don't know. I think people have this sense that she was like this superhuman girl. She was a regular girl. Regular girl that did big things for God, which I'm really grateful for, but she was as regular as anybody listening to this. We met, I remember it would have been 2000 where I was... she would just gotten back from a study abroad in London. I remember walking into my dorm, going into class, and actually seeing her coming from a class.

Jonathan Pitts: A couple of times like a composite memory I have of seeing her walk by my dorm and being like, "Who is that girl?" I'd never met her before. Our school wasn't that big. I wouldn't meet her until that next year, 2001. Right after 9/11, a friend of mine was having a party, a let's heal from 9/11, September 11th, the attacks, party in Philadelphia. We weren't that far from New York City, and I was at the party. I saw her on this porch and I'm like, "That's that girl." Somehow, some way, I'm not a bold guy, I don't have that much courage, but I asked her for her number.

Jonathan Pitts: We talked for a while, and I asked her for her number. I would call her the next week. We ended up going on a date. Actually a couple of days later, I called her. We ended up going on a date. We saw *Monsters, Inc* was our first date. Seven months later, we were engaged. There was just something about, I think, my upbringing, her upbringing. We both grew up in kind of super charismatic churches. Had similar experiences that we related to each other on, and would fall in love. Engaged seven months later, we'd be engaged our whole senior year.

Jonathan Pitts: We'd get married two weeks after that. Honestly, I think we fell in love before we fell into friendship, and I wouldn't necessarily recommend that to everyone, but that's how it worked for us. God would build friendship for us over a year. It's like every year for 15 years we grew deeper and deeper in friendship, which was really beautiful. When she died, I could say that honestly, she was my best friend. I think some people never get to be friends with their spouses.

Jonathan Pitts: They fall in love and they don't ever become friends. The thing I value most right now is how close we became in friendship, and how that friendship would lend itself to partnership, and ministry, and all the things that we got to do together. Write together, work in ministry together, in ways that we never imagined, nor did we plan. I'm really grateful for that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You have a lot of estrogen around your home.

Jonathan Pitts: Sure do.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Four girls. Tell us a little bit about Wynter as a mom and she stayed home, right?

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah. Wynter was a grant writer by trade. She had a degree in communications. In her heart, she was a creative writer, but she was really a technical writer at a college. She wrote grants, and she'd be this stay-at-home mom of four girls, overwhelmed by all that meant. I was traveling with Anthony Evans at the time on the road and she was overwhelmed. She wrote this prayer in her closet on a three by five index card, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart," that's Psalms 37:4.

Jonathan Pitts: There was grief for her to enter into this place of being a stay-at-home mom. She felt her value deplete, felt like she wasn't offering any real value in the world. She felt like the Holy Spirit told her, if you delight yourself in what I put in front of you, I'll give you the desires of your heart. She started engaging our girls in really beautiful ways and just embracing that season. What's crazy is it was in that season that she would discover, like she was trying to find resources for our oldest daughter, Elena, who was seven at the time and couldn't find them.

Jonathan Pitts: She downloaded the free copy of Adobe InDesign and mistakenly started creating a magazine. Just try to create some resource for our girls, which would become For Girls Like You magazine. That magazine would lead to her publishing eight books before she died, both fictional and non-fictional. And built this beautiful ministry out of her heart for her daughters called For Girls Like You. It makes me emotional to think about, but at her funeral. A guy named Scott Wilson, who is our family pastor, would use each one of her books to tell each one of our girls what they meant to their mom and tell them about how you're God's girl. All of her passion for her ministry came out of mothering them.

Jonathan Pitts: And so just makes me really grateful just to think about the type of mom that she was, which wasn't by nature or by accident. It was by being obedient to the Holy Spirit's call... by being obedient to the Holy Spirit's call on her life, just to embrace motherhood. Sorry, I never know when I'm going to get emotional on this stuff.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan, it's all good with me. You know that. You guys had such a beautiful family,

Jonathan Pitts: By the way, too, I'm not crying these tears of sorrow, and loss, and pain. I've grieved that. My tears are just gratitude for watching a woman be literally obedient to what God called her to do, and how God can use that. I just want to listen to know it's not sadness. It's this great joy for bearing witness to that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan, when you love deeply, you grieve deeply. It's a statement that you loved well. The first 30, 60 days, Jonathan, I mean, how do you get through a funeral? How do you talk to your kids?

Jonathan Pitts: Instinctively, I knew two things when she died. One, the number one responsibility I had was getting my girls through that moment. That day, that week, that month, that year. Then two, I was not going to allow Wynter's ministry to die. Like I said those words. I had like this, I had five children. I had my four girls and then I had For Girls Like You, this ministry that was hers. I was like I'm not letting it die. It's too important. Leading my girls, what's funny is I'm an Enneagram three achiever, Type A, so I just leaned into maybe the strength that God's naturally given me and this Western mindset, like pull yourself up by your bootstraps. I'm not saying that's the most healthy thing to do. I'm just saying that's what I did, and God would grace it.

Jonathan Pitts: I mean, honestly I think about having to tell my girls about their mom leaving this earth. The only words I had, I walked into that waiting room, it was a family room in the hospital that they have for moments like that. I just said, "Your mommy went home to be with Jesus." It's the only words I had. It's the only words I uttered that any kind of helpful, because it's what I actually believed. You might know this psychologist, Kurt Thompson. Kurt says, and I didn't know this at the time, other than the six months after he says, "To the degree that a parent can make sense of their story will be to the degree that a child can be secure in theirs." The thing that I was doing was trying to make sense of what was happening in our lives.

Jonathan Pitts: Your mom went home to be with Jesus. I mean, I lamented, but I wasn't just complaining about their mom being gone and all that. I was just owning what I really believed to be true, which was that your mom's with Jesus now. I really tried to lean into just being really honest with them about my pain, but also honest about the truth of what we believe that your mom's with Jesus. Our worst day was her best day. "The day I stopped being married to your mom when she died was the day that she actually married her better husband, her perfect husband." Like just leaning into these truths that I knew to be true.

Jonathan Pitts: What's beautiful, honestly, Tim, about scripture is when you really need it, you see how true it actually is. I leaned into that hard. Was really honest with my girls. I probably started my grief late. Probably at six months because I was so heck bent on just getting them into a place of being okay. And which again, I don't know that's necessarily the right thing to do. You as a counselor, you might say that was the wrong thing to do. But anyway, that's what I did.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I know this, Jonathan. Grief is unique to each and every one of us. We don't go on the same journey. Even the old Kubler-Ross stages of grief, they now say are cyclical, and that they just identify some of the things that we go through when we grieve. With your kids, they needed you, you knew that, and you stepped into that moment. Jonathan, you mentioned that you began the grief piece of it about six months later. I remember early on in my counseling career, picking up

A Grief Observed by CS Lewis. He even talked about having a hard time even shaving in the morning.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan, what happened to you when it finally settles in? All the busyness, and the effort of honoring, and so much more fade for a moment and you realize, "I'm alone?"

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah. Well, it's interesting. I would say I guess in some ways I did start grieving right away, because I felt super alone from day one. I never, up until that point, I never lived by myself, never had my own room. Here I find myself not only alone, but without the person that I did life with. All of a sudden, I have all these hours at night, felt really lonely. I stopped eating right away. I lost 25 pounds within two weeks, three weeks, so that set in right away. In the evening hours, I did find myself really alone. The only thing I needed to do in those times, honestly, Tim, we have these two words over our bed that Wynter put there. Be still. So I just learned to be still in those moments to kind of quiet myself. Sometimes in prayer and sometimes just to literally breathe, because I was having trouble breathing.

Jonathan Pitts: I would get anxious and I really didn't have a lot of energy in those days. I lost a lot of energy right away. When I talk about grieving, when I got to those six months, it was really beginning the process of really talking to myself and talking to God about what actually happened.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When you mentioned anxiety, I think a lot of people don't realize this, but it's very common for people who lose a spouse to develop an anxiety disorder. I think some 40 plus percent will actually go through that. This is a journey, and there are a lot of things that can trigger it. What some people don't know, like on the anniversary, it could be as intense, or even more intense, in terms of the feeling of loss. There's so many things that play into this. Jonathan, what began to help you put a bridge over it because you never really get over the loss of someone you love?

Dr. Tim Clinton: You know, the old, it takes a year to get that, that stuff is kind of faded. Research shows that this is a real journey. Was it scripture that you held on to? Was it just working out the ministry and loving on the girls? Where did you finally start crossing over, if you will, and you felt peace?

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah, it's interesting because what's actually, even in the darkness, even in like the fear of death, even like I had lots of moments gripped with fear, specifically over dark and death. But I never lost sight of gratitude for what God had given me and Wynter. The way I put it in words now is Philippians four and the discipline of celebration, Philippians 4:8. "Whatever is true, whatever is right, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable. If anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things."



Jonathan Pitts: The thing I look back on and recognize that I was doing all along, it was celebrating what God had given me, and Wynter, and our girls. There was never a moment where I wasn't playing the loss that I had versus the gift that God had given me. Whether it be I could complain like, "Oh, I only got 15 years with Wynter," or I could say, "Oh, my gosh, I can't believe God gave me 15 years of that gift. I can't believe God gave me 15 years and 27 days of that gift." I made it past 15 years, we accomplished something. I've got these four little girls that are spitting images of their mom. Thank God that I have them and the memory.

Jonathan Pitts: Thank God that I could see that she served her purposes like God wanted her to. I really just leaned into gratitude, and celebration for what God had done, as opposed to just being resentful for what I feel like I missed, or what I lost, or the expectations that were dashed. I did that in the beginning. I've continued to do that now. I think in some ways it's funny, because Paul's giving that verse. He's in prison and he's talking to a group of people who are being persecuted. "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice," Philippians 4:4.

Jonathan Pitts: And then he goes on to say, "Whatever's true, right, honorable, pure, lovely." He's saying, "Look at the glass as half full, even though you're going through hardship right now." And look at truth, because the other thing that got me through is I know that I know that I know that I know that I'm going to see Wynter again. Her season ended here on life, which brought on My Wynter Season in a way. Ultimately, I'm going to see her again. Our girls are going to see her again. It's cliché, but we don't grieve as those who have no hope. That was always a verse that I heard at funerals, and now it's this real life experience to me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I remember my dad saying that to me, Jonathan, right before he died. He just said, "Tim, it's because of Him. It's because of Him, Tim, I'll see you again. Well, that's our blessed hope." Jonathan, your family, your twin brother, Ben, your sister, CC, all of them showed up. Probably learn more now than ever the power and the importance of relationship of family, of friends, and anchored in our faith. This is the only way we can navigate through these kinds of deep waters. Jonathan, I want to close up today by referencing something, because I think it'll set up tomorrow's broadcast.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That is your oldest daughter, Elena, was pretty strong on you going ahead and moving to Franklin, Tennessee. You guys were in this transition phase. You were going to go there, as you said, the executive pastor. Tell us just a little bit about that and why you held on and said, "Yeah. We're going to go ahead and do that."

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah, I'll never forget. It was the day before Wynter's funeral. She asked me to take a walk. At that point, I wasn't sure. I could have taken my job back as executive director of the Urban Alternative and stayed in Dallas, where we had family, and security, and all that. We took a walk and she said, "Dad, are we still going to Nashville?" I said the same thing I was thinking, which is, "Well, we've got to think about it, and pray about it." I just wanted to be a good leader, I

wanted to lead my family well. Would it have been a mistake to move them away from everything they knew and that when they lost their mom?

Jonathan Pitts: And Elena looks at me and she goes, "Dad, are we going to Nashville?" And I said, "We need to think about it, pray about it." And she goes, "Dad, mommy wanted to go to more than any of us. I think we're supposed to go." I'm telling you, this 14-year-old girl was this rhema word of God to me like we were supposed to go to Nashville. In that moment, I thought we're supposed to go. And from that point on, I walked back into that house and we were moving to Franklin. What's beautiful about that is Franklin is this incubator of healing that God wanted to give us that he set in motion before Wynter died.

Jonathan Pitts: Knowing that she was going to go and we've been in this incubator of healing, but it's just really beautiful. Not that Dallas wouldn't have been fine and great, but it's just really been beautiful. I know that it was purposed by God.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan it's such a beautiful story. Hearing the love pour out of your heart toward Wynter, your family. We're going to talk more tomorrow about childhood grief and sorrow. What that's been like, what it means to create a new normal, and more. Jonathan, I can't wait to hear that. Thank you so much for joining us today here on Family Talk.

Jonathan Pitts: Thanks, Tim.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to part one of Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with pastor Jonathan Pitts here on Family Talk. They've been discussing Jonathan's new book called My Wynter Season, which he wrote as a tribute to his late wife, Wynter Pitts. We hope that you've been encouraged by today's program, and to find out more about Jonathan and his books, or to hear today's broadcast again, visit our broadcast page at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). That's [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast).

Roger Marsh: Remember, you can also give us a call as well. We'd love to hear from you, to pray with you, and provide information about how to sign up for the many free resources we have available here. Our number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. I'm Roger Marsh. On behalf of all of us here at Family Talk, thanks for tuning in today. Be sure 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.