



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Domestic Violence and the Trauma in Its Wake – Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. Shannae Anderson

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello, everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, a 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: Well, greetings. I'm Roger Marsh. And today on Family Talk, we will be sharing the second and final part of a conversation we've titled, "Domestic Violence and the Trauma in its Wake." Our guest on this special broadcast is Dr. Shannae Anderson. Dr. Anderson is a licensed clinical and forensic psychologist with over 25 years in practice. She works exclusively with adolescents and adults presenting with a number of complex issues. Dr. Anderson also provides professional consultation to other therapists who seek her clinical expertise. Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. Anderson sat down at a recent American Association of Christian Counselors event to examine domestic violence and the trauma it induces. On yesterday's program, we aired day one of their discourse. Here now is the somber yet hopeful conclusion to their conversation on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Shannae, great to have you back. What an amazing discussion yesterday, complex. I mean, that's deep stuff. We're talking about trauma psychology. Give us a highlight again, real quick, your thoughts on what trauma is. A lot of people use those words, traumatic, trauma, but in the context of pain and violence and brokenness, what specifically and how do you define it?

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Trauma, the way I use it is generally defined as an experience that overwhelms your capacity to cope and can often cause a disintegrating and fracturing of your mind. Now, that would be what we generally call a big T trauma, but there's also the little t traumas that can be very overwhelming, but they don't have that fracturing component.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Great. We referenced yesterday that physical abuse would fit in this, sexual abuse. You and I, toward the end of the conversation, talked a little bit about emotional abuse or abandonment that that can get in this lane, especially based on your personality or temperament style, right?

Some people talked about abandonment, people just shutting them out, shunning them, if you will. And people learn to use anger and other emotional manipulations to control people, Shannae. It's sad, isn't it?

Dr. Shannae Anderson: It really is. And a lot of people don't really talk about emotional, verbal abuse, psychological abuse. And research has shown that verbal, emotional, psychological abuse occurs with every other form of abuse. So if you're being hit and harmed physically, there's going to be emotional, psychological abuse. If you're getting sexually abused, it is concomitant with that.

But research has also showed, even if you do not have the physical or sexual abuse, the emotional abuse can be profoundly injurious in a little bit a different way than perhaps a physical or sexual trauma. When you're enduring emotional abuse, it really destroys your identity, your sense of self and who you are, your whole self-confidence. It rips apart who God made you to be.

When my patients walk into my office, because I do specialize predominantly mostly with women trauma survivors, they walk in and often when they try to present their initial story, it's fascinating, they often don't have words to describe it. They often blame themselves and they really are feeling lost of how they even got there. They just know that they can't live this way any longer. And they really need somebody to step outside and give them a very objective perspective of what's being done to them, so that they can begin to almost have a scaffolding, a place where they can begin to place and understand all of the things that are going on in their lives.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And Shannae, you can get to a place where inside there's a rage piece that's kicking in, because you are trying everything you can to control what's happening to you, but you can't control it. And then the abuse, the pain, the whatever it is that's coming at you doesn't stop. And in a sense, you can actually lose yourself, I'm going to say that carefully, and become almost a raging animal. Have you seen that?

Dr. Shannae Anderson: I have. And what's interesting is usually when the abuse is occurring, women tend to be terrified. And so, they will actually freeze and recoil and almost become submissive to this trauma and their anger just completely gets shut away. But then later when they feel safe or something similar-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Here it comes.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: ... triggers, they just explode. And I think one of the hardest problems with that is that then they feel like they are just like their abuser. And that does a whole other number to their whole sense of self and identity.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. We've often heard people say that, "These people don't get hysterical, they get historical." We talked a little bit about how the body stores the trauma, if you will. And this stuff then gets triggered and then it surges and explodes and

people wonder what's going on and, "Maybe I really am crazy. Maybe I do deserve it." That's an unbelievable pattern that begins to take root and it becomes compounded, doesn't it?

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Well, it does. And really, that's a function of PTSD. And a lot of times, I'll even focus on what I call relational PTSD, that when we have trauma with an individual and we are not expressing it, so if we're being battered, if we're being abused by somebody, and in that moment, we don't have the luxury to fight or flee and we have to freeze and we do have that fracturing that goes on in our mind and body, those memories are still un-metabolized in our bodies and in our brains. And so when they get triggered in the present moment, something from six years ago may come flying out.

But sadly, people don't understand the emotions that are occurring in the here and now are not current emotions, they're actually memories. But because they are implicit emotional memories, they don't come with a hallmark that says, "The rage you're feeling right now was from six years ago when your husband tried to kill."

Dr. Tim Clinton: But it just explodes all over the place.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: And they feel crazy and they feel like the anger is because of here and now. And then everyone around them says, "Oh my gosh, you're overreacting. What's wrong with you?"

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: And that's where I hate that term of overreaction, because it may appear to an outsider that it's an overreaction, but if you look at the trauma history of that individual, you can mark it back to what that anger is really tied to from the past.

But this is what I work very diligently with my patients about of understanding that when they have a triggered reaction, that trigger means something in the present is very similar to something in the past, it triggers it, and now old feelings, which are coming back as memories, intrude in the present time.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Let's talk about the words complex trauma for a moment. So, I can be an adult, I get into a bad relationship, maybe it's an abusive relationship or something and it throws me. Complex trauma would be someone who is in that situation who may have also been abused as a little kid. And so, they've got like a double whammy effect?

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Complex PTSD is a diagnosis that was created hypothetically by Judith Herman a long time ago. At the same time, that Bessel van der Kolk was also talking about chronic trauma in survivors, perhaps who had a lot of childhood trauma. He called it disorders of extreme stress not otherwise specified.

And although complex PTSD and complex trauma are not in the Diagnostic Manual, complex PTSD is generally a phenomenon of individuals who were raised usually in a home where there was extensive abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, abandonment, rejection, neglect, all of those things. They then get into adulthood and sadly are reenacting-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Got it.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: ... all that same stuff.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And so those early experiences are flowing in my way of life. It impacts my trajectory profoundly.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Profoundly.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So don't tell me that being hurt doesn't affect or infect how I do relationships in my adult years. Don't tell me it doesn't affect or infect how I view God and more. So we bring this with us is what we're saying.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Well, and what makes it even worse is looking at the early attachment dynamics that occur or in the home either before, during or after the abuse that's occurring in the home.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So either it's healthy or it's not healthy. So this makes for a pretty complicated scene. Shannae, you spend your life helping women in particular navigate those rivers. Where do you begin? Some would say, it's not easily done. That sometimes it may involve just sitting with someone up front, because this narrative is hard to pull out. It's hard to share. It's hard to even understand and recall. But as you sit with them, what's taking place?

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Well, what's interesting is they usually come to me with a problem in their current day life. So it's usually a problem in their marriage or difficulties in relationships. And they often do not see the profound connection to what happened when they were growing up. And that's where I do a lot of educating about how those early years in life are very formative in terms of how our brain and mind develop.

And if you are raised in an environment where your life is threatened, if you're raised in an environment where you do not have a secure attachment, if you do not have a secure home, that is going to affect your entire life for the rest of your life, in most cases.

And so, I really try to gently help them expand the picture of how they're viewing their life. That what they're experiencing in the present moment now is often very similar to what they've experienced in their past. And they are usually shocked by that, because they believe the past is in the past, that's done, they've locked it away. It's over and done with.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But your past isn't your past, if it's still affecting your present.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: But they don't even see that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: And that's what I often tell them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And so they're carrying this pain with them.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Absolutely.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Think of Joseph in the Bible. You remember how he had a coat of many colors and his brothers hated him, conspired against him, basically threw him in that pit, left him for dead, the whole bit? Fast forward in the story. He's second only to Pharaoh. Here come his brothers. Everybody remembers this story. And they come in and the moment comes where he's going to reveal himself to them and he does this, "I'm Joseph."

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And the Scripture says something so profound. It says that, "He wept so loudly that the entire house of the Pharaoh and the Egyptians heard him cry."

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You would've thought, "He's second only to the Pharaoh. He has everything." But here he goes back and he breaks. That's what we're talking about, right, Shannae?

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Yeah. Absolutely. Joseph could walk into my office crying, "Why am I so upset? My brothers are back in my life." And it's about going, "Wait a second. Yes, that's a wonderful blessing, but let's talk about all the years of pain that you've suffered. Your brothers hated you. Your brothers left you for dead. You had all this trauma in your life. You can't just ignore it. It's made you who you are and it gave you a lot of giftings, which I do believe trauma does." I do believe God transforms what Satan intended for evil. He transforms it into good, or I would not be doing what I do for a living.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So are you guys saying that what you have to do is you have to go back and lay down on the couch with Sigmund Freud and do all this, or is there something here that's screaming to us that we've got to give attention to, because that past isn't our past, it's our present?

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Yes. A lot of what I do with my patients is really helping them see that connection. A lot of times, I have them do a trauma journal. I'll just say, "Do a

life narrative and just make a list throughout your life of the traumatic things that have happened and then bring it in."

And we start to look at it and we start seeing patterns and choices that were made. And people are like, "Oh my gosh, I never even realized I made that choice and that's exactly what happened to me when I was a little girl," or, "Wow, it's really interesting. Every man that I pick is an alcoholic, violent man."

Dr. Tim Clinton: And she's attracted to that-

Dr. Shannae Anderson: "And he's just like my dad."

Dr. Tim Clinton: ... because that's what she knows. She's familiar with it.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Absolutely.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And she's drawn to that.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Because she knows how they live or operate-

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: ... in that.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: But when you're growing up with trauma, that stuff gets locked away because it's so painful to deal with. And that's where being able to have somebody that you can talk to and put these pieces together-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Wow!

Dr. Shannae Anderson: ... is so critical.

Dr. Tim Clinton: There is one who can step in here. Shannae, that's the gift we give to them. That's why we do Christian counseling-

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: ... Christian psychology. There's something taking place here that allows us to move beyond this to the one who is the deep lover of us.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: And I think, honestly, I could not do my work without the Lord, because these wounds are too big. Only God can heal wounds this big that have done so much damage. It's not me in the office. I am His hands and feet. And He just is able to do miracles with the people who walk in my office.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I had a moment with Dr. Diane Langberg, a trauma psychologist, who is someone we both love and respect. Diane was telling me about a woman that she was working with. A revelation came to her as she was reading the Scriptures. And she had been broken and hurt. And she said, the Scripture that jumped off the page to her was this, "They took His clothes." They took the clothes from Jesus. He knows. He knows what I've been through.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The Scripture says, "He's been touched with the feelings of our infirmities. Because He has, He knows."

Dr. Shannae Anderson: And that's something that I work so diligently in helping my patients understand, that while they are going through this, Jesus is with them. He is with them. He hasn't left them. He hasn't forsaken them. He is with them through all of it. Whether they were children being battered and abused by a parent or in current relationships, He's with them at all times. And He gets it and He understands and He wants to help.

They're like, "Why didn't He stop it?" And if He hasn't, He will, because He does. He always does. It's over for many people. And that's why they're now free to come in and get help, because it's over. And they're like, "Why didn't He stop it?" And I'm like, "But He has. There's now space for healing." And I know so much of this is beyond our understanding of why does this happen, but He knows. And I can tell you countless stories of how He has turned it to good.

Dr. Tim Clinton: "Yeh though I suffer these things, it's not worthy to be compared to the glory that one day will be revealed-

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: ... in us."

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: "Somewhere, that which was meant for evil, God will turn to good. All things will work together for good to them, we love God, who are called according to His purposes. He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall he not with Him, freely give us all things? Therefore," Paul said, "I'm convinced that there is nothing that will ever separate us from a love of God in Christ Jesus, not one thing."

So, in this journey of trying to find my way, we need safety. If you're in a hurtful, painful, bad situation, you need safety. You need to carefully reach out and get help and get out. I'm a zero abuse guy, zero tolerance. There's no tolerance for any of that.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That's the first step, we need to get help. And you need to figure that piece out with someone that you can trust.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: And find someone who is trustworthy for you. I know by the time sometimes people make it to me, they've seen a number of other clinicians and they're like, "It just wasn't right." Find the right safe person for you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. Second, when you see it, chase it. Don't get your eyes off of it. Say, "God, put that in my heart." Sometimes I pray over my clients, Shannae, that God would give them a spirit of discontent. That they would not be settled in their spirit anymore. I believe that discontent can be the agent of change.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: I think you're right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And then in that, we've got work to do, don't we? Somehow we've got to deal with this past and get ourself to a place where we can put a bridge over it. And talk to us here in closing, Shannae, about how do I get home?

Dr. Shannae Anderson: I think initially being able to admit to yourself that this is real.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And it is a broken world.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: That it is a very broken world.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We've got some sin sick people.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: And there's evil out there.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: And that, this is real. What has happened to you is real and it hurts and it's not okay and Jesus is weeping.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So that narrative recall, it's got to happen.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: But a lot of times before you can even share it with somebody else, you have to acknowledge it yourself. And so many people want to protect their abusers or are fearful of somebody finding out and them getting in trouble some way. But knowing there is hope out there, seeking hope, finding a safe person that they can talk to, to be able to put the puzzle pieces together.

I love jigsaw puzzles. People laugh at me. I always have one on my kitchen table. But that's what I see that I do for a living is I have a thousand puzzle pieces, and I never look at the box, people think I'm even crazier for that, because I want to see the beautiful whole creation that God is going to put together. That people

will come into my office and dump all their puzzle pieces, and they don't even know what they are.

And it's about really beginning to take the time to look at each piece, creating a border, creating a boundary and beginning to fill in the broken places and really allowing the Lord to just be a balm for their healing hearts and their souls, to know that He wants them whole, that we've been made in His image, that we don't have to be broken. We're not bad broken people. He loves each and every one of you and He wants you to heal.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And the road forward is all about hope.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Yes, always.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The Scripture says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." We understand that piece.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: "But a longing fulfilled changes the game." If I have a why for, if I can reach towards something, if I'm getting myself on that path, yeah there may be a lot of healing, but oh, what a glorious walk.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What a glorious road.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: And what I at time share and I will right now, I'm a trauma survivor. And it was very hard for me to come forward, but the Lord gave me hope, and I did. And I've had much therapy. And the Lord healed me even in broken places that, that couldn't help. And He has made me whole to be able now to help those who walk in my office. With the hope He's given me, I can now give to others and I can help others heal in the way that I've been healed. And that's what He does.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Let's send the program this way, why don't you speak to her heart? She's listening. She's weeping. She's broken in a million pieces and she's desperate. And then maybe you can close us in prayer.

Dr. Shannae Anderson: I get it. I get it. I know your pain. I know your struggles. I know the hopelessness. But I promise you, there's an answer. There's a way out. God is watching you. He is your Abba daddy. He loves you so much and He wants you whole. Go, find somebody safe, make a phone call, reach out. It can change your life as it did mine.

So, Father God, I just come before you and I lift up all those that are hurting, all those who are struggling. And I pray, Father, you would just hold onto them tightly, nestle them under your wings, Father. Give them your strength and

boldness, your courage to speak out and say, "Hey, I'm being hurt. Hey, I was hurt." Protect them, fill them, love them. They need your guidance so desperately. Help them feel and know you are their strength, you are their blessed hope. In Jesus' name, amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Thank you for joining us-

Dr. Shannae Anderson: Thank you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: ... and bringing a message of hope to the brokenness.

Roger Marsh: Psalm 130 verse seven, "Israel put your hope in the Lord. For with the Lord is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption." Dr. Tim Clinton made a great point today here on Family Talk. Counseling can only get you so far. No matter what abuse or trauma you've endured in your past, the ultimate healer of our hearts and the redeemer of our circumstances is Jesus Christ our Lord. I'm so thankful that psychology and its related fields have come so far in providing real help and hope to people. But friend, if you don't know Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, all the counseling in the world is just a temporary fix. To find out how you can invite Jesus into your heart and life and accept His free gift of salvation, won't you give us a call? Our number is (877) 732-6825.

Now, if you missed any part of yesterday or today's two-part broadcast, visit drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. You can stream the broadcast there, or you can request a CD copy to keep and share. Again, that web address is drjamesdobson.org. Finally, if you or someone you know is a victim of domestic abuse, please call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1 (800) 799-7233, or text the word "start," S-T-A-R-T, to 88788. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is completely free and confidential. By reaching out, you will access a network of highly trained advocates who offer tools and support to help survivors of domestic violence live their lives free of abuse. And they're available 24/7. Again, the number to call is 1 (800) 799-7233, or you can text the word "start" to 88788.

Thanks for listening to Family Talk today. We hope that you've been encouraged by what you've heard on this broadcast. I'm Roger Marsh. And from all of us at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute remember, God loves you and He is for you.

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