



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Confronting Guilt in Motherhood – Part 2

Guest(s): Julie Barnhill

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And as you know, there is no such thing as a perfect parent. Every parent must balance many demands and responsibilities, and sometimes the patience of a mom or a dad can wear incredibly thin. Unfortunately, in a weak moment, a parent can snap at their child or not give them the attention they really might need at a key moment. And yet when we mess up as parents, it's important for us to distinguish between real guilt and the unneeded blame we often put on ourselves, and it's also important to remember that God always forgives us.

Now, if you listened to yesterday's Family Talk broadcast, we heard Part 1 of a conversation between Dr. James Dobson and his guest, Julie Barnhill. Julie has written over 10 books including, *One Tough Mother, She's Gonna Blow!* and *Confessions of an Imperfect Mom*. Those are great titles. Julie is also a former contributor to MOPS International, and her writing has been featured in various publications as well. Julie is a very engaging and sincere communicator, and speaks at conferences all over the world. Today, she'll be discussing with our own Dr. James Dobson, the different types of guilt and shame that mothers put on themselves and how the best remedy for them can be laughter and grace. Let's join Dr. James Dobson and his guest Julie Barnhill right now for Part 2 of their classic conversation right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's go to probably, I would think, the moment where you generated more guilt than anything else in your life, and you told us about it the last time you were here. You were talking about anger and how you had gotten mad at your child. I guess, he was a toddler. Is that...

Julie Barnhill: Well, it was both of them. They were 18 months apart. So Kristen's at that potty training age, and Ricky Neal's just a newborn. And I like to say he just sucked the life out of me. It was just this voracious, great baby, but he wanted all of you attention wise and everything, and I was just worn out. And with Kristen when I had her, I mean, it started with thoughts and feelings that, "What is that?" And frustrations. And then as I was tired physically and just wiped out spiritually,

financially, we were struggling, it was just a bad combination of a potty training toddler and a newborn baby. And I told the story where I threw Kristen on her bed and it wasn't a gentle toss. I threw her. And that story, I cannot tell you how many women have come to me, hundreds and hundreds and emails of women who have-

Dr. James Dobson: ... and it's haunted you, hasn't it?

Julie Barnhill: ... it did. It did. And sometimes we as moms, we play this game with our guilt. Like I would ask the kids, "Do you remember when we lived in Iowa?" Because I remember what happened in Iowa and I would wonder if they remembered. And this is where there's hope, Dr. Dobson. They have some memories, but oh my goodness, how the Lord has restored our relationship and the Lord has forgiven me, and we have gone on and that little girl is 18 years old now and a freshman in college, and I delight in her, I delight in her. And Ricky Neal who I just thought would actually put me in the insane asylum, I was volunteering, "I'll go, I'll go."

16, six foot four, just a delight. And Patrick Michael, I call him our grace note, and I always said I wanted one child that if they really messed up in life, it wasn't my fault, to know that I didn't have the guilt of that past, but that's the hope in it. But I certainly, that really is where I struggled because I wounded their spirits, I crushed their spirits. And I read your books years ago and it was like, "You don't want to break, you want to..." Help me out.

Dr. James Dobson: Shut the will without breaking the spirit.

Julie Barnhill: Yes, without breaking it. And I thought, "I've broken their spirit so many times with my verbal words and physical actions.

Dr. James Dobson: When you were here before, I said to you what I want to say again, I want to say thank you for having the courage to admit that and for bringing it to light. As you say, there are many people listening to us today who lost it at some point or another. They were not what you would call a child abuser. They were loving moms or maybe dads who just got pushed over the edge and especially where we're talking to women maybe who were 17 when they had a baby-

Julie Barnhill: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: ... 18 or 19. They're just kids themselves. They're dealing with adolescents, they're dealing with all their own frustrations and they're not sure how they found themselves as a mother, and this child had just pushed them and pushed them. I'm not in any way minimizing the impact of that. Please don't anyone write me and tell me it sounded like I'm saying, "Well, that was okay," no way. I am saying it has happened, now it's done and now you're looking back on it. What do you do with that memory? Does it absolutely destroy the rest of your life or do you eventually say, "Lord, I am so inadequate before you. I mean, I

don't deserve Your grace, but I ask for it. You've offered it and I ask You to forgive me."

Julie Barnhill: I just had a mother, I did a conference in Lansing, Michigan and came to the table and all I wanted to do was just go around the table and hug her. And I thought I was scared to death, so I didn't. She walked off and came back around after hearing that "She's Gonna Blow" workshop. And I was like, "Oh, you came back," and I hugged her and she was, depression and on antidepressants just had been on for a week. And she wrote me an email and I just got it before I came out here. And she said, "Julie, how do you deal with the fact that you broke their spirits, that your words and your actions did that?" And here's what I found in my own life. I have found that it's in when we're forgiven and when we believe that for ourselves and know that it's true because the Scripture says that if I will come to him and ask forgiveness, He forgives me. Then it is I believe it's in that brokenness when we reach out to another woman when we are real and authentic because it's scary, Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: Sure, it is.

Julie Barnhill: I mean, you're in a MOPS group or you're in a little group with women and you let that out and there's not a guarantee that anyone's going to respond the way you want them to respond. But I really believe that is part of that healing. It's in our brokenness that we're able to reach out to other women and they see that they're attracted to that because they're attracted to Jesus that they see in that brokenness.

Dr. James Dobson: And then the brokenness is taken to Christ.

Julie Barnhill: Absolutely. And another, if you don't mind, this really goes to one of those mountainous peaks in the book that there's always a chapter that I don't want to write, it seems like in every book, and this one was the chapter titled Mount Unimaginable.

Dr. James Dobson: Before we get to that, let's tell people what we were talking about last time because you were drawing an analogy to guilt being related to mountain peaks in your neighborhood, and we started with Mount Shoulda and then Mount Coulda and then Mount Inconsistency, and now Mount Unimaginable. Explain what you're talking about there.

Julie Barnhill: Yeah. This is that difficult one that I'm always like, "Oh Lord, I can't write this," but it needs to be said because I've heard too many women tell me their stories, and I've struggled with it in my own way. To preface that, I think part of this in all that we're talking about is this aspect of God's character, that we can trust Him and that He is love, and that He is merciful. And sometimes that is so lost when we get caught up in motherhood and it's about do's and don'ts and keeping everything together.

And I will confess another confession for you here, it took me years before I could pray, "Lord, these children are yours. I trust you absolutely." And I can remember going to mom's groups and there'd be a mom that said, "Every mom should be able to say, "God, I'm just a steward. They're yours," and I couldn't do it, Dr. Dobson. And I knew He was love, I knew He had never done anything to prove himself untrustworthy, but to give Him my child in some way, in my twisted thinking, I thought, "If I don't pray that prayer, then that somehow maybe doesn't give Him permission to do whatever He wants to do."

Dr. James Dobson: You know what conflict was?

Julie Barnhill: Tell me.

Dr. James Dobson: The difference between what you believe theologically and scripturally and your feelings as a mom. Those often go in opposite directions.

Julie Barnhill: And that is an area where it did.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Julie Barnhill: And I hear that from moms, and then it just leads to this point with unimaginable. And I tell this story, and like I said, I never ever want to, in any way, sound like I'm trying to play on people's emotions, but this is true. I was at an event probably about 5,000 women, and I'd said, "What is your Mount Unimaginable? What is the thing that has happened or that you fear will happen if you trust God absolutely, or that you have so much guilt that happened?" So this woman somehow found the room I was at in this hotel and slipped this letter under my hotel door, and I read it and she said, "Julie, I choose you. You're the person I'm going to tell this story to." And she had her little girl in the backseat in a car seat, and she was just at that age where she'd learned to unsnap the car seat.

And she said, "I was driving. I had to get somewhere, I had to be there on time, and the little girl unsnaps, was starting to climb over the seat." And she said, "Julie, I just turned and just screamed at her, get back in your car seat." And she goes, "I don't even remember what I said." And at that moment, she kind of went off the shoulder, lost control of the car, got hit head on another vehicle, and the little girl was thrown from the vehicle. And she said, "Julie, what do I do with that?" And it had been three or four years, and she said, "Nothing, no time in prison, no amount of ticketing, nothing compares to the guilt that I have."

Dr. James Dobson: Did the child die?

Julie Barnhill: Yes. And see, that's Mount Unimaginable, and that's why we had the things that we're guilty about that seem really, you could say to me, "That's ridiculous, Julie." But we have women listening, fathers listening, families who have had to deal with things like that. And boy, it's just sitting right there.

Dr. James Dobson: You wrote about different kinds of guilt. I like to break guilt into two categories. One, guilt that comes from God's perspective, when you have gone out deliberately and sinned against Him, violated the Scripture and willfully and deliberately disobeyed what you knew was the known law of God. That is guilt that God is the author of. There's also guilt that has absolutely nothing to do with God. And in that case, that woman would've given her own life-

Julie Barnhill: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: ... before she had put her own child at risk. It was not something she intended. And don't tell me that God's got that written down someplace and He's going to hold her accountable through eternity for what she did. It's a different kind of guilt. I dealt with one mother who actually I dealt with the rest of the family and never knew this mother, but she would go out every day with her toddler to the road and they would cross together. And as a little girl got a little older, the child would run ahead and wait at the road and the mother would catch up with her and then they would go across together.

On this occasion, the mother was reading something and had other things in her mind. The child ran ahead, got to the edge of the curb and said, "Is it okay to go?" And without looking and without thinking, she said yes. And child ran out in the street and a truck killed her. And can you imagine that woman for the rest of her life feeling guilty over something that was not intentional and not divinely inspired? It was her own failure, and that's the kind of guilt that we really have to learn how to deal with. It is now done and gone. We ask the Lord for His help and in some cases you might even need counseling or therapy to work your way through something like that.

Julie Barnhill: In that chapter, my editor, when I was writing it, she said, "You didn't seem to really have a distinct answer." And I said, "You know what? I don't have one. I mean, I know the truth that you believe in those characteristics of God, that He is love and that He is merciful, and that He is kind and gracious towards you, and you remind yourself of those truths. You do the counseling." I mean, I would be interested in how you would respond to that because quite honestly, I get women, I wish I was a doctor sometimes because I think, "Oh gosh, I don't really know exactly what to tell you, but I can tell you these things about who the Father is in these circumstances."

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I think that in a therapeutic relationship, you talk people through it, you give them an opportunity to express it and reinterpret it and help them gradually, eventually your emotions begin to heal. But then the scripture said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus," and you have to leave it with Him.

Julie Barnhill: And time to allow ourselves and one another time to work through things. I said on our first program in 2003 that really, it was a seven-year journey for me from the time I was just sick of my sin and sick of the way I was behaving, and turned

from that to where I was like, "My gosh, look at this. I'm a different woman. My heart has changed for my children."

Dr. James Dobson: Was that the most challenging thing that you've gone through?

Julie Barnhill: I've had teenagers the past few years.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. I would withdraw the question. That'll bring guilt out of anybody.

Julie Barnhill: That'll humble you. I tell you that right now.

Dr. James Dobson: Especially if you misinterpret the scripture that says, "Train up a child in the way he'll go and when he's old, he will not depart from it." And if you read that to mean everything your child does is your fault, that you caused it and that all of this foolishness that you see there is because you're a bad parent, boy, I tell you what-

Julie Barnhill: You'll never leave the house.

Dr. James Dobson: ... that's guilt with a capital G.

Julie Barnhill: So yes, I've had some guilt in that area, but I've had to ascribe the, "Is it true? Is it false? And if it's true, what do you need to do about it? And what do you need to do in your relationship to heal that?"

Dr. James Dobson: All right, now you talk about Graceland National Park.

Julie Barnhill: Yes. That's where we want to get, I'm all about the grace. All about the grace. Oh, I just want to remind mothers, motherhood is supposed to be joyful. It really is. And one of the things I encourage listeners and all of us here is laughter. Boy, the power of laughter in our homes. And I can give you just a few things that we've done. One of the things I encourage moms, and this is really painful, when your kids are between the age of four and seven, so I know this, but you teach them how to tell a joke and go something like this, you teach them and they'll say, "Knock, knock."

Dr. James Dobson: Who's there?

Julie Barnhill: Cat.

Dr. James Dobson: Cat who?

Julie Barnhill: Dog. And that's the joke. And they'll say that about 45 times. That's a beginner joke, but you start teaching them how to tell joke when they're little and you get that humor going. Because I'm telling you, there are times when you have to choose to laugh or you do.

Dr. James Dobson: That's right.

Julie Barnhill: You curl up in a ball. We have had a lot of laughter in our homes. I like to encourage moms to have that thread of laughter that unites them, like VeggieTales, that was huge when my kids were younger. And one of our favorite lines from Joshua in the Big Wall is there's all this clapping, something has happened and one of the vegetables says, "How are we clapping? We ain't got no hands," and that's been a thing. I mean, for some women it comes natural. For others it's a little bit more work. You have to buy the joke books, pick up some humorous... I dare you to listen to VeggieTales, goofy songs, "I Love my Lips," and "Where's my Hairbrush? But you can't underestimate the power of laughter and grace.

Dr. James Dobson: No. That makes all of family life better. We're talking to Julie Ann Barnhill who's written a book called *Motherhood: The Guilt That Keeps on Giving*, such practical stuff in this book. It's an emotion that everybody, men and women feel. If they don't feel it at some point they're a psychopath because there's something wrong with that mechanism that the Lord has put within us of knowing right and wrong, but it can get out of control and it can dominate you over things that you can't do anything about. And that's what you're talking about, understanding the difference between true guilt and false guilt. I was thinking as you were talking, Julie, that maybe 50%, this is an estimate, maybe 50% of the guilt that women feel today has to do with the pace of living.

Julie Barnhill: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: They're exhausted. You can't do everything you know to do, you want to. You talked in the last program about prayer. That you feel guilty, everybody feels guilty because they haven't prayed enough and all of the other things. I mean, the list is endless and you can't do it all.

Julie Barnhill: You can't.

Dr. James Dobson: And then you feel guilty when you don't. So I really believe that this frantic pace at which we run is related to the almost universal condition of unassailable guilt.

Julie Barnhill: And it's not going to slow down. No one's going to hit a stop button, so we have to choose. We have to choose to slow down that pace. One of the things I'll tell moms is, "You choose the best and you say no to the rest." And a lot of our things are all best in our book, but you really have to narrow it down.

Dr. James Dobson: Julie, this book was published on Mother's Day, which is interesting, and you speak all over the country on it. What's been the response to it?

Julie Barnhill: Oh, you know what? It's that thread that women come to expect when they hear me. They're going to hear humor, self-deprecating humor a lot and they're going to hear truth. There's always a collective sigh of, "Okay, I'm not a

complete loser." And one of the things I'll have women say is, "I am a mess of magnificent proportions." And then I'll talk about this grace of magnificent proportions for us no matter where we are in our womanhood. Oh, you know what? That's what resonates is, "I'm not alone. I'm not crazy. There is hope for change," because it's not enough just to put it out there and say it. It's to say there's a process here and there is someone who is leading you to a place, to Graceland where you're enjoying those kids.

Dr. James Dobson: Julie, what makes you good at what you do, both speaking and writing and what you've done here today, is that you really do have an ability to feel what others are feeling and put it into words in an articulate way, and helping them deal with it and cope with it.

Julie Barnhill: Well, thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: And God has given you a gift there. And when you speak, it's like turning on a light bulb, in that it relieves the tension-

Julie Barnhill: It does.

Dr. James Dobson: ... of thinking you are the only one in the world.

Julie Barnhill: And it's such a lie, such a lie that we believe, and that's what we were talking about, "What do you do? How do you get through this?" And I do really believe it's being authentic with the next woman, that woman sitting next to you at tee-ball, or the woman at church that you think has it all together and just being real.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. Which mountain are you on?

Julie Barnhill: I'm in Graceland, baby.

Dr. James Dobson: You're in Graceland. You come down off of it.

Julie Barnhill: That's right. I am, and I've had these moments with my 18-year-old and 16-year-old, but caught things before they got out of hand and stuff. Spoke truth not only to myself but to them, and really it's a sweet place, not a perfect place but a sweet place.

Dr. James Dobson: That's the roadmap that you provided. Well, let me tell you what I want to do now.

Julie Barnhill: All right.

Dr. James Dobson: We have done two radio broadcasts aired yesterday and today, and there is a gallery full of women out here who I think, in fact, we talked about it before we went on the air, would like to come to the microphone and ask you a question

or talk about their own guilt briefly. And we're going to invite them to do that and air that next time.

Julie Barnhill: Wonderful.

Dr. James Dobson: We'll record it right now. We'll air it next time. Thank you, Julie for being with us. We'll pick it up right here with our gallery next time.

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

Roger Marsh: Motherhood is meant to be joyful indeed. I'm Roger Marsh, and that was our guest, Julie Barnhill today here on Family Talk, along with our own Dr. James Dobson. They were discussing the different types of guilt moms and caregivers sometimes carry as they raise their children. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for Part 3 and the conclusion of this fascinating classic conversation featuring Dr. Dobson and Julie Barnhill. They'll be speaking with a panel of moms and it's going to be a dynamic and encouraging conversation so you will not want to miss out. Now, if you missed any part of today's program or if you'd like to share it with another mom or caregiver, just visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Again, that's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

As you've been hearing over the past couple of days, parenting definitely comes with its own challenges and kids have their own needs too, especially if you have an extra effort child in your home. Now, it's understandable that if your son or daughter is a strong-willed, defiant, extra effort child, he or she can literally wear you out emotionally, physically, sometimes even spiritually, and that child can even put a stress on your marriage as well. Well, if you have one or more of these independent youngsters or adolescents under your roof right now, you know how difficult life can be, but please be assured that with God there is always hope.

Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we want to walk alongside you as a parent during these most important child-rearing years, especially if you have an extra effort child in your home. We've developed a new free 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. Now to sign up, just go to drjamesdobson.org/strongwilledchild. Remember, it's a free 10-day email series, and the place to get it, drjamesdobson.org/strongwilledchild. I'm Roger Marsh, inviting you to join us again tomorrow when you'll hear a powerful Q&A session with a panel of moms talking about confronting guilt in motherhood. So join us again tomorrow right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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

Dr. Tim Clinton:

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