



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Finding God in the Hard Places

Guest(s): Carol Kent

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone. This is Dr. James Dobson and I'm so glad that you've chosen to join us for this edition of, "Family Talk". I hope you're familiar with Psalm 34, which says, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and he saves those who are crushed in spirit." Our guest today has reason to understand that verse because she has been through very difficult circumstances of her own. Her name is Carol Kent and she is a passionate speaker, accomplished author, and loving mother, and she's going to talk about what the Lord did for her when she was going through this trial. Before we let you hear this interview with our colleague Dr. Tim Clinton, let me tell you more about Carol. She's the founder and president of, "Speak Up" conferences, which trains up-and-coming Christian writers and speakers.

Carol and her husband Jean also started a nonprofit organization called, "Speak Up for Hope" that cares for inmates and their families. She's written over 20 books, including, *Between a Rock and a Grace Place*. Carol is a highly sought after speaker for many women's conferences and a frequent guest on various radio and television programs. With all that said, let's listen to this moving conversation between Dr. Tim Clinton and Carol Kent right now on, Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Carol, as we want to unpack your story, I guess we just need to all take a deep breath and I want you to go back to the middle of the night when the phone rang.

Carol Kent: Well, I had been away for a ministry weekend and my husband Jean and I fell into bed exhausted, and we were in one of those deep sleeps when that phone rang. And I remember pulling up my head and looking at the clock and it said 12:35 AM and I saw Jean pull the receiver away from his ear and he had a look of shock and horror on his face, and he said, "Carol, Jason has just been arrested for the murder of his wife's first husband. He's in the jail in Orlando." Well, I had never been in shock before, I remember nausea sweeping over me. I tried to get out of bed, my legs would not hold my weight. I finally crawled my way into my office and grabbed a phone and got a number for the Orlando jail. And when someone finally answered and I asked about my boy, a rude voice on the other end of the line said, "Lady, we ain't got nobody by that name, Jason Kent ain't here. Lady, your son ain't here."

And Tim, for just a moment, my hope kicked in again and I thought, this must be a horrible nightmare. But as hour followed hour, the facts of the case were confirmed, our son, a Naval Academy graduate who had all of the promises of great future ahead of him, had shot and killed his wife's first husband because of multiple allegations of abuse against a man who appeared just about to get unsupervised visitation of his two daughters, my son's now stepdaughters, and he unraveled mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. And we wound up certainly between a rock and a grace place.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Carol, everyone listening is saying, "What in the world? What happened? Why did he do this?"

Carol Kent: And that certainly was our question as well. And he married a previously married woman who had two children, and there were so many allegations of abuse, supervised visitation was in place, but he had begun showing very good behavior during the supervision. And the judge was about to make a different decision to let this man be alone with these two vulnerable little girls. And our son, fresh from military training did the unthinkable, believing that these little girls were going to be harmed and we wound up in a situation we never could have dreamed of. If you would've given me a list of 100 possibilities that would be on the agenda for my life, this would never have been one of them. And I know what it's like to be a parent in total shock, feeling like I couldn't even breathe. And I know we have many listeners out there who have different degrees of crisis that they're going through and oh, it is so hard to just make yourself breathe and do the next thing.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Carol, as a part of this, what do you think contributed to the decision he made? And tell us a little bit about the case if you wouldn't mind.

Carol Kent: Well, I think a huge contributing factor was the fact that he was an obsessive compulsive personality. I think you have to have a little of that to make it through the Naval Academy. And he had been trained in how to protect Americans from the enemy. And I think in his overactive imagination, he began to realize that if the government wasn't going to stop his children from being harmed, he needed to step in. And I think the enemy who is the deceiver of our souls, began to twist his mind into believing that the only right thing he could do would be to destroy the threat to his girls. And oh my, how the enemy deceives us and makes us think that wrong thinking is right thinking, which is never the correct answer.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So here's mom and dad and this is their model son.

Carol Kent: Our only child.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We've gone from elite military training and success to a relationship here and now he's taken from us, he's gone.

Carol Kent: It was absolutely unthinkable. I remember hardly being able to function for the first couple of days, and then I realized we had some major choices that we would have to make. Would we actually keep breathing, be seen in public, begin to live again? Or would we actually hide and not answer the door and not respond to phone calls? And this was a case the media was very interested in because Jason had never been in trouble before in his life. And so it was very intriguing with the attachment to Annapolis and the Naval Academy. It just seemed that the news media wanted their pound of flesh and oh, it was so hard to even know how to function.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So I know you guys put together a case because you started trying to work on your son's behalf and there was a lot of prayers going up, you tried to enlist a lot of help. And can you just take us a little bit through that journey and then what the verdict was?

Carol Kent: Well, we went through two and a half years and seven postponements of the trial, which is a very long time to wait for resolution. And I remember at a time when we just didn't even know how we were going to make it financially or emotionally, a group of our friends got together and they said, "Carol and Jean, we're going to put together some stretcher barriers, and this will be a monthly email update of people who will receive information on how they can tangibly pray for your family and help during this difficult time." And they began to be the hands and feet of Jesus to us. I remember my phone rang one afternoon saying that the florist wanted to drop off a bouquet, and I answered the door and the gentleman said, "Hello lady, are you Carol Kent?" I said, "Yes I am." He said, "Lady, it's your lucky day."

Well, I didn't want a lucky day. I wanted to go have him just leave. But when you're depressed about all you can do is respond. And he handed me one dozen yellow roses, the most beautiful I had ever seen. And I opened the note and it was from two of my sisters. It said, "Dear Carol, you once gave us some decorating advice. You told us that yellow flowers will brighten any room. We thought you needed a little yellow in your life right now. Love Bonnie and Joy." Well, I wept like a baby. I had never been so needy, but I had never felt so loved, and that these people helped us financially. They flooded us with prayer. Some of them were even at the trial. It was a five-day trial, and I remember second guessing everything I said under oath. And we knew our son had done this horrible, horrific deed.

Our hearts went out to the family of the deceased. But we knew that in the State of Florida that when you're convicted of first degree murder, you either get the death penalty or life without the possibility of parole. The prosecutor had removed the death penalty early on, realizing that this was Jason's first offense and it would be hard to get the death penalty knowing what his motives were for saving these girls. So we knew what was on the table. I will never forget when the jury had reached a verdict. The judge came in, and the verdict was read, "We the members of the jury find Jason Paul Kent, guilty of murder in the first degree." You could hear an audible gasp in that courtroom. In the State

of Florida because of mandatory minimum sentences, we already knew then what the sentence would be. He was asked to stand again, and the sentence was read by the judge, "I sentence you to life without the possibility of parole."

And in the State of Florida, that's a toe tag sentence. It means you will never again leave a Florida State penitentiary until you are dead on a slab with a tag on your toe. It is the rest of your life. We watched our son be put back in handcuffs, in a waist chain, and as he was leaving the courtroom, he turned in our direction and I just mouthed, "I love you son." And I could hardly even speak as the cameras were in my face and as every journalist wanted what we had to say following the verdict. We got back to April's house, our son's wife, and all we could do is just hold each other and weep. And two hours later the phone rang, and it was Jason, he said, "Mom and Dad, they brought me back to the faith-based area of the Orlando jail." And he said, "Word of my conviction and sentencing had already hit the jail."

And he said, "These big old maximum security inmates came up to me and they said, "Jason, if a man like you gets a sentence like this, there's no hope for us. There's no hope."" And he said, "God gave me the ability to stand up and preach," and I said, "Men, if we walk in freedom in this lifetime or in the next, we will still one day walk in freedom if we know Jesus." And we knew he was going to be okay. And that has really led us to this place that we call being between a rock and a grace place where we need to now lean into the place of safety, the place of rest, the place of renewed hope and the place of courage that is only found in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Carol, every parent listening right now is taking a deep breath and they can't even imagine. Let me ask you about God for a moment, Carol, honestly, how'd you feel? Where was he?

Carol Kent:

Well, there are certainly moments when you go through this level of experience when you think he's not there. And I was raised in a Christian home, my first memory in life is coming to know Jesus at the age of five at my mother's knee. And I remember even as a teenager saying, "God, you can do anything with my life. I want to passionately follow you." And I made that my goal. I remember praying over my child in my womb for God's blessing on that child's life. And then when Jason was born, we raised him in a godly Christ fearing way. It felt unfair that this had happened when we had tried so hard to be Christ-like examples to our son. And I remember the day when I just got down on the floor, prostrate before God and I was just sobbing. And then I found myself beating into that floor and it was as if I was beating into the chest of God saying, "Where are you? I know that you are omnipresent. I know you know my son's heart and that he loved and wanted to protect those girls. Why didn't you keep him from this devastating thing?"

And the more I began to pound him, the more I could not resist leaning into the embrace of God. I did not fully understand what was happening, but I knew that based on everything I knew from the Bible about who God is, that I still had faith

and I still had the belief that God would not waste anything that happened to us even though I did not understand his rationale. I was angry with him, but I still had faith. And that sounds like a paradox, but it's a mystery that I can only explain in the supernatural dimensions what happened.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Our emotions are crazy at those times, Carol, they're just insane. I recently saw a portrait, I won't forget in the mall, and it was this little girl who was just so upset and her daddy grabbed her up into his arms and she was just swinging, but she was collapsing at the same time. She was angry, but just desperate for his embrace. How do we keep ourself from being just so filled with anger and resentment and bitterness? We swallow it.

Carol Kent: I don't think it's anything that happens overnight or in a moment or because we're just saying, "Okay, right now I'm going to choose to just accept this and go with the flow." It's a process. And for me, that process was relinquishment. And I'm a first born obsessive compulsive preacher's kid, the oldest of six. I'm one of those people you could call a little bit bossy, driven and perfectionistic. And so I was in this situation that I could not redo, I couldn't handle, and I found myself just saying, "Lord, what now? What can I do?" And I was totally at the end of my resources. My mind would bounce to scripture like the Abraham and Isaac story. And I just remember after seeing my son at the jail following a terrible beating that I wound up crying in the parking lot of the jail saying, "God, I can't control this. I relinquish to you everything about my expectations for a happy life and for normal family reunions. God, I just give this to you. I can't control it."

And I would love to tell you that I got better really quickly, but it was a long process. And I'm still in that process because there are good days and bad days, and I know parents out there going through a rough spot understand what that feels like.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Carol, we're all familiar with the old footprints, a piece of work that hangs in a lot of our offices and our homes. How do we get to that place where we can trust God so much that we actually believe he's carrying us, that he's in the midst of it, that his presence is enough? How do you go there?

Carol Kent: Well, in the first place I discovered it was very hard to read scripture because my eyes would be so full of tears that I couldn't see the words on the page. I let my mind go back to scripture I had memorized long before the arrest of Jason. And one of those verses that came to me was John 10:10, "I am calm that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." And then I would put worship music on in the background because sometimes through the power of worship music, God will speak to our souls when we can't even formulate thoughts in our head. And the third thing I needed to do was to find one friend I could trust with everything I was going through, who wouldn't say, "Oh, that's horrible that you're questioning God right now," but she would listen more than she would talk and she would pray for me and just sometimes hold me.

And sometimes we think we have to have hundreds of people as a support system, but really all we need is one Godly friend who will listen and validate the fact that we are in horrible pain and be willing to wait with us until the next step. And then after I went through some time, the next step for me was beginning to choose purposeful action, to decide in my spirit along with my husband, Jean, that we would not allow the enemy to immobilize us, but that we would choose to use what has happened as a platform upon which we could give God glory. That again was a process, it did not happen overnight. But one of the most important things we did was to start looking around for one person who needed help more than we did every single day, and we would try to do something tangible to reach out to that person.

It might have been groceries to a single parent who needed help, or it might have been having a family in for a meal because we knew they needed encouragement, or sending a text message or an email in the form of a prayer to somebody in trouble. And we discovered that once we got our focus off how needy we were and on helping to meet the needs of others, that was a gigantic step for us in the healing.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Carol, do you, maybe you and Jean, do you guys get tired?

Carol Kent: We get exhausted. And one of the reasons is that we get hundreds of email, Facebook and social media requests to talk to people who are in desperate circumstances. And I know many of our listeners don't have a son in jail or in prison, but they might have a child with autism or they might be struggling financially or they might have cancer or there's just something, that, that spouse that promised to love them forever has betrayed them, and we aren't able to personally meet all those needs, so then we live with the guilt of disappointing people. We do get very weary. But all we can do is get back to the people we're able to get back to in one day, and then you go to the next day and you try to network people with resources and excellent Christian counselors who can give them help to make it the next mile of their journey.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hey. Hey, Carol then, you know what I'd like to do maybe is reframe my question here then. Do you and Jean get tired of it all though? I'm talking about all the weight and the pain and the day-to-day drudgery of fighting and fighting and fighting?

Carol Kent: I must say there are still days when I would just as soon not get out of bed in the morning. We get weary for sure. There are days when we would just as soon not be dwelling on an eternal perspective. And I think there are certain times when you just need to give yourself permission to feel the agony and feel the pain.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, and it's okay to say, "You know what? I don't like this. I didn't choose this road and I don't like this."

Carol Kent: I totally hate it. There are days when I walk by a closet and I'll see one of Jason's Naval Academy uniforms, or I'll hear a song on the radio that reminds me of him in his younger years and all of the joy. I hate it so much that sometimes it gives me a sick stomach. And Jean would say the very same thing, and we just give ourselves permission to cry.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I'm thinking of Jesus in the garden and he says, "You know what Father, if it be your will, let this cup pass from me. I don't want to do this." I can hear Paul saying, "Lord, remove this thorn in my flesh. Please, I beg of you, I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want this journey." When I think of pain in my own life, I don't even want my mind to go there at times, Carol, because I don't want to drink that cup. And I say, "God, don't let me learn the hard way. I don't want to learn the hard way. Help me to learn the lesson. Can I prove to you God that I can handle it on my own, just because I don't want this, "Gift of pain," or whatever you want to call it. I even hate calling it a gift of pain because I don't want a gift like that at all, Carol. And then the Apostle, Paul says, "Yet nevertheless, I've learned that your grace is sufficient."

Carol, that's where I want to go. I want to wrap this program because we've talked a lot about being caught between a rock and a hard place, but you're talking about a grace place and wrap us up with grace. What is it?

Carol Kent: Grace is unexpected, it's unmerited and it's a surprise. And it really to me is God's favor and his smile in the middle of a difficult place. I want to tell every listener to start making a list of the places you've seen God's grace. For us, our son was rushed to the hospital with appendicitis, his appendix had burst. You don't get the best of healthcare in most prison situations, and after they discovered what it was at the first hospital, they said, "We don't have the emergency staff to handle this." He was sent to a second hospital. We didn't get a call until the day after this major surgery. And the corrections' officer was telling us what happened and I said, "Well, where is he?" And he said, "We can't tell you, ma'am. That would be a security risk." And I was desperate to know. I remember the officer saying, "Well, he'll probably be back on the compound tomorrow."

I said, "You're telling me he had septic toxins moving through his entire body and he'll be back on the compound tomorrow?" Well, for the next five days, I prayed that God would send someone to be like a mama to my boy. And I called the prison every single day and every day they said, "He'll probably be back tomorrow." So we knew he had been hospitalized longer. When we finally got to speak to him, he said, "Mom and Dad, I was in such pain, but there was one nurse, her name was Nurse Betty, and she felt my need. And he said, "My back was hurting so badly, I was placed in a chair. And when it was time for me to get up, she lifted me up and she put her arms around me and she said, "Son, you just lean against me until you get your bearings."" And he said, "Mom, it was just like you were holding me and that she protected me and cared about me. Her name was Nurse Betty, and she was on duty the day I was released."

He said, "Mom, it was like having a mother there in your place." And do you know Tim, we've tried to contact that hospital so we can personally thank Nurse Betty and nobody has ever heard of her. And I'm just reminded that no matter what situation in life we go through, there are amazing grace places if we just look up. We might not get the answer to our prayer we most wanted, but we can still say, "Thank you, Lord for the grace place," and Nurse Betty was one of those for our son.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, this is James Dobson again, and I hope you were encouraged by what Carol shared with us on, "Family Talk," today. We can truly rely on God to walk with us through the darkest times of our lives. Have you ever had that happen in your life? I certainly can speak to it. I urge you to learn more about Carol's various ministries by visiting today's broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. There you can also get information about her many popular books as well. That's drjamesdobson.org, then click on the Broadcast tab at the top of the page. You can also access any radio program, Family Talk has ever done in our archives, I hope you will go there. Thank you again for listening to, Family Talk. Join us again. I'm James Dobson. Have a blessed day everyone.

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

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