



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Living Through the Loss of a Spouse – Part 2

Guest(s): Dee Brestin

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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.

Roger Marsh: Welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and if you joined us yesterday, you heard Dee Brestin share with us about how she felt after the death of her husband, Steve. Steve lost his battle against colon cancer after 39 years of marriage with Dee. She recalled how empty the house they shared felt, and what it was like to adjust to life without her beloved husband. Today, we'll hear part two of that conversation with Dee Brestin as she shares more about how she grieved and learned to carry on after Steve's passing.

If you are struggling with a loss, or maybe you know someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one, here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we are here to help. We pray that today's message will serve you well and that you'll find the kind of peace that Dee Brestin did after Steve's passing. Dr. Dobson even learned about this lever of grief through the eye of his mother, as she grieved the loss of her husband and the sorrows of a life that carried an emptiness after his passing. Now, if you're not familiar with Dee Brestin, let me share a little bit about her. She is a speaker and an author of the best-selling book, *The Friendships of Women*, and also *Falling in Love with Jesus*.

Dee has also written over 20 Bible studies, including the book titled *Proverbs and Parables*. She speaks at many large women's conferences throughout the year. Now, Dee lost her husband, Steve, back in 2004 to colon cancer. Together, they raised five children and they have many grandchildren as well, who all love Jesus. Today's conversation, featuring Dee Brestin, and our own Dr. James Dobson was recorded almost two years after Dee lost her husband. Let's join them right now, right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Dee, right at the end of the broadcast, last time you were talking about a Jewish tradition called ...

Dee Brestin: Sitting Shiva.

Dr. James Dobson: Shiva. Yes, Sitting Shiva, which has to do with coming to grieve with those who grieve.

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Not to give instructions or advice necessarily, but to just be there.

Dee Brestin: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: Explain that. Yeah.

Dee Brestin: The word Shiva means seven, and they were supposed to go and not speak unless the mourner spoke, and then if the mourners spoke, they could empathize, but they weren't supposed to talk, which is wonderful. I don't know why it divides the grief to have somebody cry with you.

Dr. James Dobson: Did anybody do that for you?

Dee Brestin: Oh, lots of people did that for me, and that ministers more than anything. Even today, I'll go into a shop, and somebody that I haven't seen, I see her, and she'll start to cry, and I love it. One of the best notes I got when Steve was diagnosed was actually from a childhood friend, and she's not a Christian, but maybe that freed her not to spiritualized, but she just wrote in a great, big, black magic marker, "No, no, no." That's all she wrote, and administered to me 'cause that's exactly what I was feeling.

Dr. James Dobson: That's what you were feeling. Yeah. Dee, what time of day was the hardest for you?

Dee Brestin: Oh, it's always in the evening when I ... I used to so look forward to Steve coming home. Even after 39 years of marriage, my heart would leap when he would come home.

Dr. James Dobson: Isn't that amazing?

Dee Brestin: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: How could that be? That's called love, you know? That's called love.

Dee Brestin: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Just the pleasure of being together, and that's what you miss, isn't it?

Dee Brestin: I miss that so much, and I'm trying to let Jesus fill that space. I want my heart to leap in the same way for Jesus when I sit down with Him with the Word. One of the best grief books I've read is by Jerry Sittser, and he said that, "We don't get

over a catastrophic loss. We live with that loss, and yet, it is possible for the soul to be enlarged," and my soul is being enlarged by this loss.

Dr. James Dobson: Going back to the nighttime, which are the lonely hours, does it help to have people come and be with you, to stay with you, to-

Dee Brestin: It does. I think there's a natural response to grief to isolate yourself. When you need community the most, you often push it away, the way Naomi did, push Ruth away.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dee Brestin: I think I overdid it. I'm the kind of person, I was so panicked to go up to our cabin alone, that I filled every day with guests, and I was exhausted by the end of last summer.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dee Brestin: This summer, I'm being a little more sane. I am inviting people, but I'm also allowing myself to be alone and feel the pain. I'll listen to requiems, and I'll just feel the pain, because I've got to do it sooner or later.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, what do you say to the people who say, "Dee, you're wallowing in it. Get over it. It's time that you got on with life"?

Dee Brestin: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: What do you feel when people chide you that way?

Dee Brestin: You know, I so understand that because I've been one of those people. I remember having a widowed friend, and after three years, I thought, "All right," and I remember talking to Joe Bayly, who lost three children, and I said, "Isn't it time for her to be past this?," and he said, "Give her the time she needs. I also think that you grieve more when you lose a better man. There's that proverb that says, "When the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy," but when you lose somebody good, you hurt more, and that's actually good. That's why Shakespeare said, "Parting is such sweet sorrow," so if I am still hurting in 10 years, yes, it's a tribute to my husband.

I can live with pain and loss, and life can still be meaningful. There can still be purpose. I am so thankful for the man I had, but I'm also more thankful for life. It's precious, it's a vapor, and I want to use it as well as I can for whatever time I have left.

Dr. James Dobson: I'll bet you're one good grandmother?

Dee Brestin: I am trying. I don't know that I have been such a great grandmother, but the regrets I had about Steve have led me to repentance. In this last month, my daughter-in-law came with the four grandkids to the cabin, and I thought, "Okay, I'm going to put aside my writing. I am going to spend time with these grandkids," and I did.

Dr. James Dobson: What helped you and what hurt? Let's talk about the helps first.

Dee Brestin: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: What did your friends do that really made a difference?

Dee Brestin: Well, the Scripture says, "Mourn with those who mourn and those who mourned with me and cried with me." Also, the practical helps of the Body of Christ, those who really did things. I remember when I went up to the cabin in the summer, I thought, "Oh, there's always that inevitable dead mouse or bat and the footlong grass," and I didn't want to go alone. Well, my friends didn't let me go alone. They came with me and, yes, they found the dead bat, and they cut down that lawn, and they were there with me, just this ...

Dr. James Dobson: They make meals for you?

Dee Brestin: They made meals. I loved it when people brought in meals. My daughter-in-law's mother made this amazing meal the night before the funeral and served it as well for everybody that was there. My husband's partners all came to my daughter's wedding when she didn't have a dad to walk her down the aisle. Last week, Steve would've taken my grandson, Simeon fishing, and I said, "Simeon, I will take you fishing," and he said, "Grandma, can you take the fish off the hook?"

I thought, "No, I cannot do that," but a 14-year-old and a 21-year-old boy in our church said, "We'll take him fishing." You know, that helps.

Dr. James Dobson: And they did.

Dee Brestin: And they did, so the practical things of coming alongside, and the person grieving doesn't want to ask. If you say, "If there's anything I can do," they're not going to tell you, but if you just come over and shovel the walk, or if they say, "Can I weed your garden? You don't need it," at least you know that person is the one you can ask to take your grandson fishing.

Dr. James Dobson: My image is you have one person carrying a huge load, a 10-pound block of concrete on your shoulders, and another person comes along and gets under it too, and now you got two people sharing that right grief. Is that what you meant, dividing the grief?

Dee Brestin: Yes, dividing the grief. When somebody else cries and misses Steve or feels my pain, I can't quite explain it, but it does divide it. It takes some of it, but when somebody says, "All things work together for the good for those who love God," I know that's true, but it makes me want to punch them, because that isn't what you need to hear when you're in high tide grief. Later, yes. I can handle it later, and I-

Dr. James Dobson: I suspect you already know that, and you've read those Scriptures too.

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: In some ways, it comes across as saying, "Get over it," you know?

Dee Brestin: Yeah, it does.

Dr. James Dobson: This is going to work for the good for you because you love the Lord and call according to His purpose, but there's a time for that.

Dee Brestin: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, yeah.

Dee Brestin: A time to speak and a time to be silent, and when you are in a high tide grief, it's the time to be silent and to cry.

Dr. James Dobson: High tide grief, that's an interesting phrase. All right. What happened to you that was not helpful?

Dee Brestin: I think that there were those ... And I can. I look at their hearts now, and I understand 'cause I did the same thing you babble on. You are nervous. You're afraid you're going to say the wrong thing, so you say too much, and you do say the wrong thing.

You point out the silver lining, and you're trying to help. You're trying to fix it, but fixing isn't what you need at that time.

Dr. James Dobson: You need understanding.

Dee Brestin: You need understanding, you know?

Dr. James Dobson: Referred to a knife in the heart?

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: What does that mean?

Dee Brestin: It's just sticking out of my heart and it's invisible, and if somebody comes up to me and tells me why they think Steve died, or why I shouldn't be sad, it's like they bump up against that knife, and I try to keep smiling, but it's just plunging it to depths of pain.

Dr. James Dobson: That is what frustrates me more than anything, is when a person is struggling like never before in life, they've just gotten a diagnosis that may mean death and certainly great inconvenience and surgery and pain, and that whole aura is on you.

Dee Brestin: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: And people begin to try to come up with simplistic answers, which do not help.

Dee Brestin: Answers there aren't. They don't help.

Dr. James Dobson. If there were not sin in your life, you wouldn't be going through this.

Dee Brestin: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: That's the most unkind thing you can say.

Dee Brestin: And if you had enough faith.

Dr. James Dobson: Even it's true, the Lord can help you get that across in a different way, or the little child that has died and God wanted that child in His garden.

Dee Brestin: Right. Right.

Dr. James Dobson: They mean well, they mean in doing this, but it does stick the knife in the heart.

Dee Brestin: They mean well.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Dee, something happened today that I think is worth sharing, because you came in a little early.

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And we are recording this right after lunchtime, and you have just been to lunch, and you ran into somebody that you didn't know was here.

Dee Brestin: I did. God is so good because my friend, Dawn, has been one of my greatest prayer supporters. Her husband was a partner with Steve, and they've moved to Minnesota, but they wanted to hear a broadcast, and then they heard.

Dr. James Dobson: They had no idea you were here.

Dee Brestin: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: And you had no idea they were there.

Dee Brestin: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: We didn't arrange this, but it's kind of neat that the Lord did.

Dee Brestin: Yes, He did. He's good at arranging things.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I have tagged her, and she is coming into the studio right now. Tell us her name again.

Dee Brestin: Her name is Dawn Walker.

Dr. James Dobson: Dawn Walker.

Dee Brestin: She is a wonderful prayer warrior. Her husband actually gave me a total knee, and she prayed through the whole surgery, which is a long surgery, and I said, "Dawn, I didn't even pray through my dad's whole bypass surgery."

Dr. James Dobson: Ah. I am not going to get up to greet you because I'm going to stay here at the microphone, but Dawn, welcome. Glad to have you here.

Dawn Walker: Thank you. Great to be here.

Dr. James Dobson: You had no idea you're going to be on the broadcast today, did you?

Dawn Walker: No, I sure didn't.

Dr. James Dobson: And I didn't know who you were until about an hour ago, and yet, you do know Dee, and you prayed for her through this difficult time, didn't you?

Dawn Walker: I did. I certainly did and still do, actually.

Dr. James Dobson: Are you a prayer warrior?

Dawn Walker: I love to pray.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Well, when Steve died, you were there to witness and to experience that terrific loss. Tell us what you saw with Dee during that very, very difficult time.

Dawn Walker: Well, of course, it devastated the entire community, because Steve was very well-respected in the community, the medical field man of God. In fact, we were on the same school board of a little Christian school there in Kearney, and I was a member as well, as well as Dr. Brestin, and so I saw him in action. I saw him care about that little school when he didn't even have any children in that

school, and worked with him a lot in that capacity as well, so I don't know, I just saw it to be a devastating thing for all of us. One of the things that I did besides praying just for Dee and Steve from the very beginning of learning of this illness was God put it on my heart to open up my home and have a day of prayer for him and invite everyone in from the community, all the women that might want to come alongside and pray. I set it up in an atmosphere where people could pray together or silently, and I opened up all the rooms, and I had a big poster there so people could write a note to Dee and Steve at how much we were praying for them, and that was probably the highlight of, I don't know, God just meeting us all on their behalf crying out.

Dr. James Dobson: What a gift of friendship to you.

Dee Brestin: Oh, she has been an amazing friend, and we have seen so many answers to prayer, amazing things that God did. I'd like to share one story if there's time.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, of course.

Dee Brestin: My daughter, Sally, wanted to do a painting of Aslan, inspired by the line where the children discover that he's not a man, but he's a lion, and they say, "Well then, is he's safe?," and the answer is no. Don't you know who he is? He is the son of the emperor beyond the sea. Of course, he's not safe, but he's good, so she tried to paint a lion that wasn't safe, but was good. This is all enveloped by prayer, and when she completed the lion and it was huge, she said, "I've got the not safe part, don't I, but I don't have the good part," but one after another of us said, "Sally, don't you see, the other animal at the heart of the lion, there was a lamb who looked as if he had been slain?"

Like in Revelation, it says, "Behold the lion of the tribe of Judah," and then I looked again and I saw a lamb who had been slain, and she finished that on the day that Steve was diagnosed, and there were so many other things. Dawn has prayed for our family in so many ways, and I'm not surprised you're still praying, Dawn. That's a real friend.

Dr. James Dobson: It's not a coincidence that you're here today, Dawn, as well. Anything else you want to tell us about Dee and what happened during that time?

Dawn Walker: I just feel that she is so courageous and she's listening to the Lord because both Steve, through the Lord obviously is asked her to continue her ministry to women, and she has ministered to women, myself and women all over the world, and I just praise God for that.

Dr. James Dobson: She continues to do that work, doesn't she? Obviously speaking 30 times a year despite the pain, Dee, you are determined to serve the Lord as long as He leaves you here.

Dee Brestin: It's a way of carrying on Steve's legacy too, 'cause he believed in my ministry, and I do notice that widows flock to me now because they know. I understand.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, there will be more after today. Any last thing you want to say. Our time is almost gone, but any last thing that you want to say to somebody out there who is right now where you were at the worst of it?

Dee Brestin: I think it's easy to feel angry with God when He doesn't do what you ask Him to do. I have a daughter who's newly married, and when she and her husband argue, he wants to hold hands. She doesn't particularly want to hold hands while they're arguing, but he said, "It's to show we're still united." I think that what I would tell you is there's a temptation to back away from God because He didn't do what you wanted, and you don't want to read His Word, and you don't want to be with His people, but you're cutting off your lifeline, and even if you don't feel like it, stay with His people and stay in His Word because He does love you and He knows what He's doing. He's not safe, but He's good.

Dr. James Dobson: But He's good. Well, that's what I tried to write in when God doesn't make sense because there is something that we call the betrayal barrier, and sooner or later, everybody bangs up against it, because He has all His power. He spun all of the worlds in place with just His Word.

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And He could do it. He could have healed Steve.

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: He chose not to.

Dee Brestin: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: Dawn, despite your prayers, He chose not to heal Steve.

Dawn Walker: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Who in the world knows? Who can explain why?

Dawn Walker: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: We would be God ourselves if we were able to answer that.

Dawn Walker: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: Only God can answer that.

Dawn Walker: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And we're not gods. We're mortal human beings, and so what does He want from us when He doesn't make sense? What does He want us to do when the pieces don't fit, when there is confusion everywhere? I tried to serve Him. I have lived for Him.

I've kept my life clean as much as is humanly possible, and I've tried to bring as many people to Him as possible, and He has let me undergo this terrible illness in the diagnosis, and we know the outcome. If he doesn't choose to heal us. Why would He do that? I don't know. What does He want? He wants us to keep on believing, and to maintain our faith.

Dee Brestin: Yes. Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: You call it cutting off the lifeline. It is a lifeline.

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: He is a lifeline at a time like that.

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: You cannot afford to say, "Well, I'm going to look for another." There is no other.

Dee Brestin: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: You stay with Him.

Dee Brestin: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: And in the end, we do know that all things work together for the good of Him that love the Lord, but there is likely going to be some pain between here and there.

Dee Brestin: Yes. Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you have kept the faith that, Dee. We admire you greatly. I hope you will keep on doing what you're doing, continue to write, continue to speak, and when you got something that God puts on your heart, you come here and say it, will you, because you have an open invitation?

Dee Brestin: Thank you. I'm so thankful for you and your ministry.

Dr. James Dobson: Dawn, I'm glad to have met you. Thank you for allowing us to scare you to death and call on you, to come out of the gallery and join us in the studio. And you know what? When you get through praying for her, you won't pray for me, but I think that's about the best gift you can give anybody.

Dawn Walker: I do pray for you.

Roger Marsh: Wow. What a touching and emotional conversation on today's edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and I hope this broadcast help you understand a little bit more about the complexities of grief that come with the death of a spouse. You've been listening to the conclusion of a two-part conversation, featuring our own, Dr. James Dobson and Dee Brestin. Dee bravely shared with us her story of loss and grief, and I know you might be dealing with loss right now, perhaps even the grief of having lost your spouse. Well, you don't have to manage that heavy weight of sadness on your own. Here at the Dobson Institute, we're here to listen to you, and we're here to pray with and for you.

If you'd like to talk to one of our trained customer care team members, call them. They're standing by 24 hours a day at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Dee Brestin understood that the pain of loss can sometimes push us away from God. Well, it's important to remember that God loves us even through our pain, and perhaps you have a neighbor who needs to hear that message today.

A great way to reach them with that good news is with a life basket. Let me explain. A life basket is a way to bless a neighbor with a beautiful basket of treats and goodies that introduces them to Jesus Christ. It also invites them to enjoy the loving Christian community of your local church at Easter. Life baskets are also a fun activity that you can do with the whole family or with your friends.

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Again, for Defending Faith, Family and Freedom Podcast, start by clicking onto our homepage at drjamesdobson.org. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for joining us

today, and be sure to join us again next time for another edition of Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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