



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: You Are Not Alone – Part 2

Guest(s): Tom and Dena Yohe

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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: The following program is intended for mature audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

Welcome back to Family Talk, the listener supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and today's program is the second half of a heart wrenching conversation featuring Tom and Dena Yohe. The Yohes are the parents of a prodigal daughter who was bullied growing up and began cutting herself at the age of 12, and then wrestled with depression, addiction and suicidality for many years. She's now in recovery and doing quite well; praise the Lord for that. But Tom and Dena suffered for many dark years as a result of their daughter's struggle and destructive decisions. In 2015, Dena wrote a book called *You Are Not Alone: Hope for Hurting Parents of Troubled Kids*, in an effort to encourage other parents of prodigal children.

Dr. Dobson and Dr. Clinton were together to lead the upcoming conversation. And by the way, if you missed part one of their interview with the Yohes, you can listen to it by going to drjamesdobson.org. Okay. Here now are Dr. Dobson and Dr. Tim Clinton on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: As we get started, Tom, let me turn to you and talk to you as a dad. Daughter who you loved with all your heart, you'd do anything for. You know her journey. She was bullied, mental health issues, depression, et cetera, suicidal thoughts. I think you even talked about sexual trauma, addiction and more. And you're a ministry family, and you're a daddy. How did you deal with maybe feelings of guilt and shame with this?

Tom Yohe: Well, it was very, very difficult. And being in ministry, we didn't know other families that were going through these things, or especially the depth of these things that we were facing. So, we didn't know who to talk to or how to even talk about it, or maybe should we talk about it, because will this eliminate us from our ministry? But I used to take long walks with the dog at night and look

up at the stars. And that was my really alone, quiet time with God. And he just directed me back to Genesis. And I began reading Genesis and I said, "Oh my gosh. Here's Adam and Eve in a perfect environment with only one boundary, and they couldn't keep it. They didn't even have a sin nature, and they could not keep it. They rebelled against God, the Father."

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. They didn't have television. They didn't have drugs. They were in a perfect environment, and God for a Father mind you.

Tom Yohe: God, for a Father

Dena Yohe: Perfect parent.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. I wonder if he had not been God, if he wouldn't have been embarrassed by what Adam and Eve did. Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's easy, Dr. Dobson to drop your chin.

Dr. James Dobson: It is.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And you get lost in it.

Dr. James Dobson: In a sense it makes perfect sense. Because you bring these babies into the world and you are the one that teaches them and trains them and loves them and diapers them and takes care of them. And if things go wrong, it's obviously your fault. If you're a better parent, this wouldn't have happened. It's not fair. And it's self-destructive, and I hate to say it, but there are a couple of Scriptures that lead people to think that way.

The one that says, "train up a child the way he should go. And when he is old, he won't depart from it." That seems if we interpret it one way that it is all your fault if you'd have trained him up right he wouldn't be having these problems. And then Timothy talks about the fact that there are qualifications for leadership in the church and those that can't control their own home are not qualified. If those two things go together and are misinterpreted, that lays more guilt on you. And yet we know that God is not the father of guilt and when you've done the best you can and you've given everything that you've got to these youngsters, you would lay down your life for your child. I'm sure you felt that way. It's not accurate to say that God stands over you as a condemner and tells you that this is somehow sinful behavior that led to this tragedy. I don't believe it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dena, I wanted to turn to you for a moment. Your story about Renee is horrifying in a lot of places. You guys experienced a lot of trauma. When you talk about leaving your cell phone in the bathroom, because you couldn't live with it beside your bed. How did you deal with all the fear? I talked to a

gentleman recently, he said, "I can't even sleep at night because I'm afraid, my daughter, something's going to happen to her."

Dena Yohe: Yeah. Fear is one of hurting parents' worst enemies because it just binds us up in knots and paralyzes us. And for me, I poured myself into the Scriptures looking for verses to help because that was my source of strength. But then I stumbled upon a very practical exercise that I actually learned in an Al-Anon meeting to help cope with fear. And it's called a God box and I got a little, little box and I wrote "My God Box" on the top, got a little notepad and a pen. And whenever I became aware of something I was feeling anxious or fearful about, about Renee, I'd go get that out and I'd write it down, fold it up, put it in the box. Sometimes I say, "Oh no, I got another one." Fill out three or four papers, put them in there and put it back up on the shelf.

And for me there was so sounds so simple, but it was so powerful because number one, I was more mindful of when I felt afraid because sometimes, I didn't even realize, "Why am I so irritable or edgy today? Oh, it's because I'm afraid that this might happen to Renee," something about then putting it into words, seeing it there in black and white was very helpful. And then it symbolized putting it in that box, putting the lid on and sitting on the shelf was surrendering it to God, giving it to Him, giving her to Him again and again, again, because it all comes back to trust over and over again. Trusting Him more, little bit more because I'm powerless. I can't fix her or change her. I can't make those things stop that I'm so afraid of, but I can do these things that will help me to release it and have a little more peace about it. Not total, but more, or I can cope and I can live ah, with that, ah, little better.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The fear can be immobilizing though. It really can rule your life.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Did you feel His presence in moments like that?

Dena Yohe: Very much. Very much. There were very few times that I didn't feel Him there. Now, there were many times where I didn't see Him doing anything where I would become a little angry and just wonder, "Where are you? What's happening? Why aren't you answering my prayers?" And I had to go back to rework a lot of what I believed. What do I really believe about suffering? What do I really believe about prayer and the goodness of God? And I had to go back and be sure those things were scriptural and correct. But fear was a very difficult thing to overcome because she could die and that's worth being afraid of.

Dr. James Dobson: We left your story last time with Renee being 20 years of age and having severely cut herself to the point that you were really fearing for her life, even though you were 1,000 miles away, take the story from there on. What has happened since then?

Dena Yohe: Well, since then she has been in rehabs to get help with her alcohol and drug problem four times. And she has done well sometimes. And she has relapsed many times. She's continued to struggle with the cutting for a long time. But today she has overcome that. It took a lot of determination, a lot of help from counselors, but it's a wonderful thing for her to be free from that now. She also experienced being raped on numerous occasions when she was high. And that was another very difficult thing for her to process, which she's still processing and us too. That was the deepest pain I think I experienced, the greatest grief. My shattered dreams really lay at my feet. And that was at the point where I myself wanted to die. Just anything to stop the pain. As a mother, finding this out about your child still brings me to tears. The thing I prayed the most would never happen to her, but she made choices that put her in places where that did happen.

Dr. James Dobson: So, she was raped numerous times.

Dena Yohe: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: While intoxicated-

Dena Yohe: Yes

Dr. James Dobson: ... or on drugs.

Dena Yohe: And there would always be someone there who would take advantage of her and Tom and I really, really struggled with how we felt about those men that would never be brought to justice. And each of those incidences pretty much ended up in her severely cutting herself because she couldn't stand the guilt. She felt so terrible about it. And again, we talked about the self-hate and those were grievous times for us where we had to learn how to process that grief and those feelings. And it took a very long time and we were very fortunate to find a program in our city, just for families whose children had been raped or gone through some kind of sexual trauma led by a great therapist, and weekly for a year we saw each other work through our anger and grief and sadness and all the emotions that go along with that. And Renee has written on that topic in my book. And I love some of her insights, but that was some of the most difficult part of my journey, and Tom's too.

Dr. James Dobson: What's your relationship now?

Tom Yohe: It's very good. She's actually with us now at home in Orlando. Physically, emotionally and spiritually, she's probably the best she's ever been. She's very healthy right now. And we're thrilled to have these times together.

Dr. James Dobson: Praise the Lord for answering prayer. It came late, but it came.

Tom Yohe: Yes, it has come. And it's something we'll continue one day at a time, but we are enjoying relationships that we haven't had for 10 years.

Dr. Tim Clinton: One of the difficult subjects for parents to talk about is the tough love piece, the boundaries. It's a part of your story. And it's an ongoing part too. Can you tell us a little bit about how you did that piece? Because there's no way either one of you individually or together as a couple can withstand that much pain, perpetual pain in your life.

Dr. James Dobson: You never get away from it, do you?

Dena Yohe: When she came home from her first rehab, we had told her before she went, that we would support her recovery 100%. We'd help her. She could live with us if she needed to, till she could support herself. But if she chose to use again or relapse, then that meant choosing to live somewhere else. And she understood that. It was very clearly explained. And when she returned from the rehab, one evening, something happened, which led to a very difficult decision.

Tom Yohe: She had asked to go to a birthday party with a friend and we said, sure. And so she called about 11:30, 12:00. She says, "I want to stay all night." And I said, "Do you want to stay all night, because you're having such a good time or do you want to stay all night because you're drinking?" And she says, "I'm drinking." And I said, "Well, you know what that means?" She said, "Okay." And the next day she came home, packed up her things and left.

But before she left, we had probably one of the most adult conversation we'd ever had with her on our porch that night. She said, "Dad, when I was in first rehab, the people who were recovering said they knew when they were done. And I don't think I'm done." I said, "But Renee, you don't control what done means. Done can be dead. Done can be physically maimed or disabled. Done can be a number of different things you don't control done." She goes, "I know, Dad, but I don't think I'm done." And we stood up, we embraced each other. We told each other how much we loved each other.

Dena Yohe: It was very loving.

Tom Yohe: The three of us. And she walked off the porch into the night.

Dr. Tim Clinton: How do you get to that place of loving and kind of letting go, because I know you guys are still loving. You're still going to show up for her. But at the same time you had to put that in place. How do you get to that place?

Dena Yohe: Not quickly. It was a long, slow process of learning what we could and couldn't do. Finally accepting that we couldn't change her or fix her, learning to let go and detach with love. That we would still care about her, but not for her. And we just knew that by doing this, it hopefully would bring her to her end sooner.

Tom Yohe: A lot of prayer.

Dena Yohe: A lot of prayer.

Tom Yohe: Even get to the point of an agreement on a boundary was a lot of prayer and talk because we said we cannot have a boundary without the two of us together.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So, you did that with her.

Tom Yohe: Well, we, first Dena and I would settle it between the two of us. What boundaries do we set? Which ones are we going to be able to enforce equally together so that she's not playing one against the other and then presenting her with the boundaries and going over with it so she clearly understood what they were. And I think she wrote too in her book, in Dena's book, a segment where she told us that setting that boundary was one of the most loving things that we did.

Dr. James Dobson: Dr. Clinton, you and I have seen families like this for many, many years. And one of the tragic consequences among other tragedies is that the marriage starts to suffer.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It does.

Dr. James Dobson: Or maybe it's one of the first things to suffer because you begin to, in some cases, blame each other and the anger that you feel toward the child is addressed to the spouse. I mean, there are traps all over the place. How did you guys deal with that? Or did you go through that?

Tom Yohe: Yes, we did, definitely. And I was very fortunate. I went to a Christian university and I was studying for the pastoral ministry and a very, very seasoned pastor and professor was teaching, and just off the cuff, he told us one afternoon, "Any tragedy of any kind guard your marriage." And I remembered that as a single man, I remembered that. And when this started to happen, I said, "We need to guard our marriage. We need to make it a priority. We need to be even more intentional that we already have been with this." And so we would make sure that we had date nights. And on those date nights, we would not talk about Renee.

Dena Yohe: It was a no prodigal zone.

Tom Yohe: We declared it a no prodigal zone. And she could not be a part of the conversation. We would talk about us. We would talk about our relationship and spending the time together, honing through what are the boundaries we want to set so we could be united. And we were also very fortunate as part of Campus Crusade, they had "Weekend to Remember." So we were able to attend those and continue to cultivate our marriage and our relationship. And I

think it spills over to other siblings. She had a younger sister, was just two years. She was in the house where our son was four years older. And so he was off at college. So he wasn't in the middle of a lot of this stuff.

Dr. James Dobson: But she was.

Tom Yohe: She was, she witnessed a lot of this stuff and we had to sit down and explain to her, said, her name is April. Say, "April, it's like somebody who has a broken arm. That's going to get a lot of attention right now because it needs it, but it's not permanent. It's not always going to be this way. And you may feel neglected right now, this won't be permanent." And so we found some times to really build in some special occasions with April and give her some special treatment that she wouldn't have gotten before, because Renee was taking attention.

Dr. James Dobson: And that was so wise because it's typically where you have one all-consuming problem like this, you have to ignore the normal youngster who is doing things right.

Tom Yohe: Yes.

Dena Yohe: We worked very hard to lavish a lot of praise and compliments on both her and her brother, and words of appreciation, and really spent a lot of time investing in them. And fortunately they have never resented their sister. They're close today. We've seen the benefits of that.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, Dena, when you were writing, *You Are Not Alone*, you became aware, I understand, that you began to see this book also for what you could do to contribute to other families who are going through same thing.

Dena Yohe: Well, I wrote it because I wanted parents to get a picture of how they could cope better with these most difficult issues, which was how I chose what I addressed in the book. Disappointment, the feelings of shock and denial, the fear, the worry, the anger, how to let go. Wanted to show them how they could do that, how they could get through this and not just survive, but even come to thrive again, and then adding in my daughter's perspective, which is a really unique voice in the book.

So, my whole purpose was for people to really, really know that they weren't the only ones. It was a lot of help out there. And the difference that prayer could make, gratitude and all the resources, which we had a very hard time finding books that would address the different topics, websites, what kind of support group, where? And so I put a whole lot of those in the back to try and help parents find them more easily. But yes, it was to be, here's how you can make it and to encourage and comfort you that you're not the only one, like I thought I was.

Dr. James Dobson: One of the last chapters is called "A New Kind Of Hope." So you're reaching out to others when you wrote that.

Dena Yohe: Oh yes. And speaking to myself too, because for a long time, my perspective of hope really was kind of, "Okay, God, here's how I want everything to end. Here's how I want this all to work out. Answer these prayers this way, please. That's my hope." Well then through getting into the Scriptures more and more, and reading more, I came to realize that it's much bigger than that. That's fine, but I needed to keep my focus on the character of God and His word. What can I really know for sure. And I made a big, long list, like that He would always be with me, that He would sustain me, that He would uphold me, that He would help me confront my fears, all of those things that I could know for sure that were absolutes.

That was where I wanted to point and direct people, that this tension between yes, we have hope because God is the God of miracles. He does the impossible. He can do anything, but yet holding that loosely, keeping your focus on Him, surrendering and releasing whatever He allows, knowing that whatever does happen because some parents' children will end up with AIDS. They will marry their same sex partner. They will end up in prison, maybe for the rest of their lives. And some won't make it, they'll die. What then? What kind of hope do they have?

Dr. Tim Clinton: What do you say to the mom or dad who turned the dial up and it's their story? They're in it right now. They need to hear from you Dena, from you Tom, something, in this moment, this hour of their life.

Dena Yohe: Say, please, don't isolate. Don't stay alone. Please just know that you're not the only one, that God will never leave you or abandon you. He's not mad at you. He's right there with you. He's for you. He's got you. And no matter how bad things look, He is with your child and He will never give up on them either.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you invite people to get in touch with you?

Dena Yohe: Yes. We love people to connect with us. They can connect with us through our Facebook page, which is "Hope for Hurting Parents." And then through our website, which is hopeforhurtingparents.com. And through that, they can read my blog. They can sign up to receive email subscription, words of encouragement and hope, Scripture, prayers, things I've found that helped me.

Dr. James Dobson: Dena, I want to say something to you.

Dena Yohe: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Mothers are more sensitive typically than fathers are, more easily wounded. Mothers are mothers, after all. And mothers are made differently. And I admire you for hanging in there, for doing what you had to do to deal with an impossible situation, for continuing to love and continuing to care. And for

remaining faithful to your husband and for leaning on the Lord, when there was not much evidence that He was hearing you. And there are times for all of us when we wonder if our prayers are bouncing off the ceiling, and I'm sure you had moments like that. And you stuck it out, and you continued to do what the Lord asked you to do, and you deserve a whole lot of credit and I'm sure Tom agrees with it.

Tom Yohe: Amen. Amen.

Dena Yohe: Thank you, Dr. Dobson. Thank you. Only by God's grace.

Dr. James Dobson: And thank you for writing this book. *You're Not Alone: Hope for Hurting Parents of Troubled Kids*, Tom, it wasn't easy for you either.

Tom Yohe: No.

Dr. James Dobson: Dads are not made of stone. We're as vulnerable in some ways and can be more so on some occasions, but I thank you too, for continuing to be the dad and the father that God called you to be.

Tom Yohe: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: And finally, I thank you for coming here and opening this embarrassing, painful, depressing part of your life and trying to help other people with your story.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We're broken people in desperate need of one another and God's presence and power. And we do that together.

Dr. James Dobson: And He's there even when you can't feel Him being there.

Dena Yohe: Yeah. Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: It's great to have you here. It's a pleasure getting acquainted with you. Stay in touch with us, will you?

Tom Yohe: Thank you.

Dena Yohe: We will.

Dr. James Dobson: Thank you very much.

Dena Yohe: Enjoyed being here.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to Family Talk and the second half of Dr. Dobson and Dr. Tim Clinton's touching conversation with Tom and Dena Yohe. I'm Roger Marsh. And if you missed part one of their conversation or any of today's installment, just visit drjamesdobson.org and select the tab marked Broadcasts. I sincerely

hope that this conversation was an encouragement to you. Having a prodigal child is one of, if not the hardest trial a parent will ever face. When a son or daughter that you would give anything for, would die for in a second, makes harmful choices it is devastating.

That's why Tom and Dena founded the ministry called Hope For Hurting Parents. It's a ministry designed to support parents of teens or adult children who've made destructive choices or have destructive behaviors. Now to find out more about Hope For Hurting Parents, go to our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org and select the broadcasts tab. When you're there, you'll also find a link to Dena Yohe's book. It's called *You Are Not Alone: Hope for Hurting Parents of Troubled Kids*. And of course you can always reach us by telephone. Our number is (877) 732-6825. Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. We understand that life is full of ups and downs, and we are here to support you through each and every season of marriage, parenting and beyond. I'm Roger Marsh, inviting you to join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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