



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Depression: Encouragement for the Journey – Part 3

Guest(s): Rev. Tommy Nelson

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Dr. 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: Does the church hold something of a double standard when it comes to mental illness? Does the cancer patient seem to get more sympathy and compassion from Christians than the one wrestling with a season of depression, for example?

Pastor Tommy Nelson knows how frustrating it can be to reach out to fellow believers during a season of depression only to receive well-meaning words of counsel like, "Well, you just need to memorize more scripture and get through this." Well, during the next half hour, Pastor Tommy Nelson will share the valuable life lessons he learned as a member of the growing group of Christians who experience depression, and statistics tell us this fellowship numbers in the millions.

Welcome to Family Talk with your host, psychologist and bestselling author, Doctor James Dobson. I'm Roger Marsh. On today's broadcast, we're going to hear the conclusion of a three part conversation with Pastor Tommy Nelson on the subject of Depression: Encouragement for the Journey.

Before we begin today's discussion, let me reintroduce our guest. Tommy Nelson has served as pastor of the Denton Bible Church of Denton, Texas since 1977. He's also a national platform speaker for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Campus Crusade for Christ, and other national organizations. He's the author of numerous books, including his story of battling depression called *Walking on Water When You Feel Like You're Drowning*.

Now on the day he recorded with Doctor Dobson, they were joined in studio by a group of college students who were invited to listen in on the conversation and then they were given the opportunity to ask questions of Doctor Dobson and Pastor Nelson. Here now is that first question to open today's edition of Family Talk.

Audience Member 1: I just recently graduated. I'm going to be starting my first job. Many of us are highly driven, sort of motivated people, and combined with that we have this passion for Christ and we really want to serve Him with all of who we are. I don't know if it's fair to say what would you have done differently, because I know you've learned so much from this experience and you've had so much influence in your ministry, but what would you say to us to maybe not get to the point where you were and what are just some practical things that we can do?

Tommy Nelson: What a good question. I think it's what Jim said, that I would guard my evenings. One of the problems with modern day and electricity and everything is you turn night into day, and so you have no demarcation. Protect your nights. Make sure that every day that you have a time that you withdraw in the Word of God, and every day you need to do something that's fun. I like to lift weights and run. Jim does his ... He plays basketball.

Dr. Dobson: Not anymore.

Tommy Nelson: He used to be a basketball player. You need every day to do something that is intellectually stimulating, because you're a learner. Every day, you need to do something that's fun, that's a hobby that you enjoy doing, and you need to cultivate your friends, and you need to protect your nights and make sure that you're getting enough rest. I'm a great believer in a New Testament sabbatical, that on your Sundays that you give that time to resting, to reading the Word of God, and just having a good time. You know, you can stretch a life out a pretty good ways if you do that. What do you think?

Dr. Dobson: Oh, I think that's wonderful. Let me add to it that specifically for those that are your age and those that are going on into graduate school, what I've observed, even though you're young enough to get away with it, you often do the same thing and jam so much into the bag that you can't hold it all. Specifically those who go to graduate school, get married with all the stresses associated with that, and a baby comes along, and you're trying to earn a living while paying school bills and so on. What about housing? Let's see if we can paint this place, or we can fix the kitchen or what have you. Then you love the Lord and you're involved in your church. You can do exactly the same thing.

You don't tend to break physically for doing that, because that comes a little later. You start having marital problems. I've seen that over and over again. You've got to protect that relationship. If you get to going too fast, I really believe that is the most common source of divorce is you get too busy to even know each other, or take a walk together, or be together. It becomes certainly a barrier to parenthood, because you don't know your children either.

This culture has a sickness. It's a hurry sickness, and it starts for those your age. What we've been talking about today, Tommy, is very relevant to those that are young enough to get away with it physically, but it'll eventually catch up to them.

Tommy Nelson: Read Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes tells you seven times to enjoy life, your mate, the work of your hands. You eat Rocky Road ice cream?

Audience Member 1: No, but-

Tommy Nelson: Start. Start.

Audience Member 1: Okay.

Tommy Nelson: Whatever you need to enjoy. I like Braum's chocolate.

Dr. Dobson: That'll give you a heart attack too.

Tommy Nelson: I enjoy Braum's chocolate. But don't take life that serious. You're not going to get out alive. But like Jim says, we have a success driven culture. It's almost a religion. You need to live, and to enjoy life, and enjoy your mate, and enjoy your kids, and enjoy the tee-ball games you go to, enjoy your parents and your in-laws. You know, Eden means delight, and that's what God meant Eden to be, of a man, his wife, his job, his kids, God. Life was simple. Keep the thing simple.

Dr. Dobson: There's another delusion that comes along with it, and that is the belief that it's temporary. You know, "if I can just get through school, if I can finish my degree, if we can get this business started, we'll hire other people and it will slow down."

Tommy Nelson: Right.

Dr. Dobson: It's always tomorrow. It's going to be slower tomorrow. It's tough right now, but we're going to get there. We're going to come to the point that we're really going to lean back and enjoy it, and the days flow into months and months into years, and you realize that you've made the same mistake that others are making.

It's a tough thing to fight, and I've had to fight it through the years. Like I said, I've stopped short of where you went, but I sure could have.

Tommy Nelson: Each success you have is you forge a link in a chain you've got to carry. You want to be real careful about making your living your life, because it's not. You enjoy God and his Son and his Word, delightful friends, good times, and you give your job as good a deal as you can do for those 40 hours, and then you forget about it and you go home and enjoy your mates, and share the gospel, and buy a good camera, and climb mountains, and body surf.

Dr. Dobson: Watch football games on Saturday.

Tommy Nelson: Watch football games. Yeah. Enjoy life.

Dr. Dobson: Do you love to do that?

Tommy Nelson: Oh, baby.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. Put my feet up.

Tommy Nelson: Good coffee. Do you have an addictive substance? You need to get an addictive stuff.

Dr. Dobson: Oh, come on. Wait a minute now.

Tommy Nelson: Coffee. With me, my recreation is a great book, a great read, and I love to get a good old Starbucks or something and enjoy good coffee. Just all the little things, the cracks that you stuff in in your mad pursuits, when you get older, you find out that was the real thing that you enjoyed the most.

I don't know how many times I'll get businessmen that are just pushed and stretched to the brim, and I'll say, "When's the happiest time?" and they go back to when they were in a rent house in college with their wife making \$500 a month, able to go out and eat once a week with their kids, and they enjoyed life. Now they're into a living. See?

When you're college, kind of, it's a neat time because you can officially be impoverished, see, and you're not a bum. When you're in college, you can just enjoy life, and relationships, and romance, and all of these things. You just enjoy life. Once you get married, now there are all those expectations. All those baccalaureate messages start coming back on you, that you have to achieve these things. You need to be careful about believing all of those messages that you heard. You've got to enjoy God, and his Son, and his Word, and his cause, and your mate, and then you make the money you can make with the skills that you have and use it for good things and Rocky Road.

Dr. Dobson: That's great advice. Next question?

Audience Member 2: I'd rather not give my name, because what I'd like to ask is pretty personal.

Tommy Nelson: Sure.

Audience Member 2: When you spoke about how you visited your psychiatrist, you kind of mentioned that as being the turning point in your journey through depression, and you also mentioned that it was very difficult for you to take that step and actually sit down with someone.

Tommy Nelson: Sure. It was just an issue of pride on my part having to do that. It was hard.

Audience Member 2: Yeah. I guess what I'd like to know is if you have a loved one who is experiencing depression, it can be pretty disheartening when you feel like there's nothing you can do for them.

Tommy Nelson: Right.

Audience Member 2: I'd kind of like to know what you would say to someone to encourage them to take that step, to get the help, because it can be especially hard if they are refusing to go. What would you say to someone who doesn't want to take that step to seek the help?

Tommy Nelson: I've had that question asked so many times of loved ones that are suffering, especially a man. Women will tend to do things, be a little bit more proactive, but men will ... It's like coming out of the closet to let everybody know that we're mortals. What would you say, Jim? I know you've heard that more than I have.

Dr. Dobson: Well, obviously within the same family ... By the way, thank you for sharing that. The emotion in your voice speaks for itself. This has been a very difficult thing for you and for your entire family I'm sure, so thank you for sharing it. Certainly we will honor the confidentiality of it.

But you need to just be there for those that are in your family that are struggling and hurting in that way. Tommy, you mentioned the fact that you would go to the mailbox because there was encouragement there. At a time like that, you really need those that you love to understand that you act kind of weird at that time. You don't say the right things. You don't do the right things. You're sometimes not very nice person. Yet, at a time that they are the most unlovable, they need your love.

In terms of your specific question, the individual in your family you're talking about will not go for help. Is that correct?

Audience Member 2: Yeah, I would say that.

Tommy Nelson: My wife took over, to be honest, with me, because I remember the first time down at the Cooper Clinic that they gave me a full physical and they said ... The girl used that phrase, the doctor did. "I think you're going through extreme anxiety." That hit me wrong. She mentioned taking something, and that hit me wrong because ... and I said no. Well, my wife, it finally got to the point that my wife got the name of the doctor and she said, "I'm calling the doctor, and you're going in." She called the doctor and said, "Tuesday at 10:00, don't you be anywhere, because I'm driving and you're going to get in the car." I guess if I hadn't of ... That's tough love, but she made me go down.

You have to make sure that the person you're going to is reputable. Like Doctor Dobson's father had a very negative influence through a very bad psychiatrist. I

had a very good one that gave me some real good counsel. A lot of times I'll give people the name of a man and the phone number and I'll say, "Call this man. And when you call him, I'll call him before to get you in quick, because he'll go ... If I say that I'm sending you, he'll get you in quick."

My wife took the bull by the horns, got the doctor, called him, and said, "You're going." If there's a bunch of you in the family, like I think there is, y'all just need to gang up and take them in.

Dr. Dobson: There ought to be somebody in the family that ... We'll say it's your dad. I don't know who it is, but if it's your dad, somebody that he responds to, somebody that has influence with him, and somebody that can put an arm around him and kind of nudge him. But ultimately, that individual has got to get to the place that he has just reached the end of the rope. He's got his back against the wall.

Okay. Next question.

Audience Member 3: Hey, Pastor Nelson. My question has kind of got two parts. In high school, I had a friend who dealt with depression after her parents had gotten divorced and got help thankfully, but also was prescribed to medication that helped kind of alter her mood a little bit, make her feel happy. I'm not exactly sure what it was. But still is prescribed to this, I guess, three or four years later. I know it's a little different, but you also mentioned that you used medication to help you sleep.

Tommy Nelson: Right.

Audience Member 3: I know that's very different.

Tommy Nelson: Yeah, in addition to what I was doing. I had to get some sleep.

Audience Member 3: Yes, sir. But also there's also naysayers, people who will tell you that medication simply does not help. It's not a matter of medication. It's a matter of getting over this mental block that you have.

Tommy Nelson: Yeah. Thank you, Bildad. Thank you, Eliphaz. Thank you, Zophar.

Audience Member 3: Exactly. I guess kind of my question is, what is your understanding on the medication that's out there, and what is your opinion where the happy medium is between medication and no reliance on that?

Tommy Nelson: Yeah. You have to ... The world tends to want to medicate you but not give you moral counsel. The body of Christ quite often will give you moral counsel but can't believe that there's anything physiologically wrong. The world will forget the front end. The Christian Church will forget the fact it can be physiological. To be merciful to them, a lot of the knowledge we have on this stuff is late coming, so there's a lot that maybe we didn't know 30 years ago that we know now.

What you have to do is both of them. You really need a good counselor that can talk with you, like a guy talked with me. Matter of fact, one of your friends, Chuck Swindoll called me during this time.

Roger Marsh: Oh, yes.

Tommy Nelson: He said, "I want to talk to you like a Dutch uncle." I don't know what one is, but Chuck talked to him and he said, "You've got to pull back." He said, "I've watched you, and you're like me, and you've got to pull back." He said, "I've been to places where it was tough with me, and you've got to pull back."

You need guys on the front end that can help you, like a counselor that says you've got to ... He said to me, "You got to pick one of these four jobs. Which do you want? But you can't do all of them." But then you've got to have somebody that can get a board under your wheel to get you out to where you can now operate. The stuff that they have come out with now is pretty good.

Audience Member 3: Got it. Thank you.

Dr. Dobson: You know, we have talked about this on the radio before, and there are still many, many people out there who don't understand the need for emotional help when you're in difficulty. Every part of the body can malfunction. Your big toe can get a boil on it. I mean, every aspect of your body is subject to defect. We live in a fallen world, and the brain can also malfunction. What's wrong with treating it? You treat every other aspect. I mean if you do have tuberculosis or something, if you do have a disease that's treatable, it'd be crazy not to seek that information from those who have studied it for a lifetime. It is silly for Christians to say you can have every disorder, but not an emotional disorder.

Tommy Nelson: Right.

Dr. Dobson: It's just not true, and it puts a tremendous strain on an individual who's trying to serve the Lord for you to go to them and say, "You've displeased God." Well, maybe you have, but that may not be what's causing your emotional problems, or it may. I mean, that's why you need help.

Tommy Nelson: We don't want to discount that there are people that fall into deep sin can come out of that highly depressed.

Dr. Dobson: Absolutely.

Tommy Nelson: That is a fact. Sometimes you have to say repent. You do need, but you'll know it when you have to say that. A lot of times it's just overwork or some people just have a genetic predisposition to it.

Dr. Dobson: Here's a phrase that I've used so many times it's become a cliché, but I will say it again, and it came from my father. The mind, the body, and the spirit are very

close neighbors, and one often catches the diseases of the other. You have emotional problems, then it becomes a spiritual problem. God doesn't love me. God doesn't care. You have a physical problem, then you begin to wonder, why would God do this to me? You have a spiritual problem, it becomes emotional problems. Those three things interact together. We are a unity. We're not three separate components in that way. That's why it's important to understand that you can get into great difficulty spiritually when that really wasn't the root cause at all. Okay.

Audience Member 4: Something that was never really addressed is that you guys have ... People go through depression, but there's a point where you go back into doing things, and you will become stressed, because life is stressful. My question for you is, how do you talk to people that don't think that it is a real disease, as well as getting over those times where it is stressful to make sure that you don't relapse into a depression? Because I see that as a common problem today.

Tommy Nelson: You know, when I went through this thing, the guy that counseled me said, "Now, don't think that you're going to get to feeling better and you say, 'I can go back and do what I always did.'" He said, "That's what you young guys ..." Because I'm just a child at 57. He said, "That's what you young guys all think you can do, and you can't." He said, "You can repeat this if you don't watch it. What got you here, you can still get on that track." He said, "You've got to do a major change."

I say that to people. Once you've gone through that, you have to take real good stock. You can have some real relief within about four months, but then it takes you a few years to get reoriented and not do what you were doing.

Dr. Dobson: Okay.

Audience Member 5: I'm wondering if you can expand upon the role of your family. You mentioned how influential your wife was, but more specifically, what was the role of your kids through your time of depression, and how has your relationship changed as a result of that?

Tommy Nelson: You know, my sons were great, and they weren't real sure what their dad was going through. I was kind of the rock to my sons, and they're tough guys. One's a sniper, one's a ballplayer, and they're tough guys. My one son said to me, he said, "You know, the agency I'm in ..." He's a federal agent. He said, "We've got lots of guys go through stress, go through stuff like this." He says, "Man, you get burned out," and it touched me to have ... My son's a big guy, tough guy, strong guy. He's a bad guy.

Dr. Dobson: He was telling you he understood.

Tommy Nelson: Yeah, and this tough guy's saying ... You know, it was like there was a tenderness in him. He said, "We go through this, and you're going to be all right."

My younger son was kind of the same way. He was like nonchalant and he said, "You know, God's taken you through all the stuff you've been through, and he's going to take you through this, too." I can truly say if I hadn't of had my sons and my wife there, I don't know what I would have done.

One of the counselors I went to gave me a statistic, and I can't remember, of how many marriages fold through depression because the mate didn't sign on for this. I had a guy call me once that said his wife just said, "I'm out of here," and it's sunk him. But my sons were there with me. Yeah. You go through it as a family.

Dr. Dobson: Well, the next time you come, you bring Teresa with you.

Tommy Nelson: I will.

Dr. Dobson: I would really like to meet her.

Tommy Nelson: She starts crying within about 12 seconds, but she would love to talk with you.

Dr. Dobson: It is such a pleasure to meet you face to face. I've admired you for a long time and we would love to continue working with you. Love to have you come back. I said it twice and you haven't responded at all. You going to write a book on this?

Tommy Nelson: Now, when James Dobson tells you to write a book, you write a book on this.

Dr. Dobson: Yes.

Tommy Nelson: More and more I see that you write about things that there's a desperate need for.

Dr. Dobson: Yes.

Tommy Nelson: The more I do this, I say there must be a reason God had me go through this. We are comforted in all our affliction that we might comfort those with the comfort by which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Dr. Dobson: Well, one of the reasons I think God may have allowed you to go through this is because you're going to be able to help a lot of other people, and you did today and on these broadcasts. It took a lot of courage to open up and admit this, I would think.

Tommy Nelson: Sure.

Dr. Dobson: You have been willing to let the Lord use it, and I thank you, and let's do it again.

Tommy Nelson: Thank you, Doctor Dobson.

Dr. Dobson: Thank you, everybody.

Roger Marsh: On that note, we conclude this informative three-part conversation with Pastor Tommy Nelson on the theme of Depression: Encouragement for the Journey on today's edition of Doctor James Dobson's Family Talk.

Now, all throughout this conversation, you may remember Doctor Dobson encouraging Pastor Nelson to put his thoughts and reflections into book form. Well, now he has. The book is called *Walking on Water When You Feel Like You're Drowning: Finding Help in Life's Darkest Moments*. You'll find a link for this resource at drjamesdobson.org. While you're there, you'll also find a number of other helpful resources for strengthening your marriage, your family, and your faith. Again, find us online at drjamesdobson.org.

Then click over to our Facebook page and join the conversation about this broadcast. Depression is a topic that many Christians don't always feel comfortable talking about, so we have created what you might call a safe space for conversation about the topic of depression with our Facebook community. You can find us at facebook.com/drjamesdobson.

I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for joining us today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Doctor James Dobson's Family Talk.

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

Dr. Dobson: It used to be believed that most children were basically happy and carefree, but that's changing. Now we're seeing more signs of serious depression in children, even as young as five years old.

Roger Marsh: Doctor James Dobson for Family Talk.

Dr. Dobson: Depression in adults is hard to diagnose, and in children it's even more difficult. In adults, the warning signs of depression include diminished energy, tiredness, fatigue, a general loss of interest in life, and sadness, crying, that low down feeling. If a five to 10 year old is depressed, he may show signs of lethargy. He may not want to get out of bed in the morning. He may mope around. He may show no interest in things that would normally excite him. Sleep disturbances and stomach complaints are other warning signs. Another symptom can be open anger, hostility, and rage. He may lash out suddenly or unexpectedly at people or things around him.

If you suspect your child is beginning to show the signs of depression, there are several things you should do. First, you should help put into words the feelings

of the child and try to find an explanation for their sadness. Make yourself available to listen without judging or belittling the feelings expressed. Simply being heard can go a long way toward lifting a child's depression. Finally, I urge you to seek professional help if you feel the problem is out of hand.

Roger Marsh: To get involved, go to drjamesdobson.org.

Dr. Clinton: Hi, everyone. This is Doctor Tim Clinton here for Doctor James Dobson's Family Talk. You know, the news comes in all kinds of shapes, sizes, and formats these days, but how do you cut through the noise and get to the heart of the matters that affect your family? Come to Doctor James Dobson's Family Talk and sign up for Doctor Dobson's monthly newsletter. You'll find clarity on tough issues, encouragement for your everyday life, and trusted principles to help you build strong, healthy, connected families. Go to drjamesdobson.org, sign up today. That's drjamesdobson.org.