



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Out of the Dark: My Journey Through the Shadows to Find Joy

Guest(s): Mandisa

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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: According to the National Institute of Mental Health, an estimated 21 million adults in the United States had at least one major depressive episode in 2020. America is experiencing an epidemic of mental illness and the body of Christ is not immune. I'm Roger Marsh, and you're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Today on the program, we're going to hear from someone who has experienced depression and suicidal thoughts firsthand, despite having enormous success as a gospel and contemporary Christian recording artist. To introduce his guest, here is our co-host and resident authority on mental health and relationships here at the JDFI, Dr. Tim Clinton.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: We're coming to you from the Extraordinary Women Conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma. One of these extraordinary women is our guest today on the program to talk about her new book *Out of the Dark: My Journey Through the Shadows to Find God's Joy*. Her name, Mandisa. You may know her from her time as a contestant on season five of American Idol, or her hits songs "Stronger," "What If We Were Real" and my favorite, "Overcomer." Mandisa is a Grammy award-winning gospel and contemporary Christian recording artist. Her 2013 album *Overcomer* won a Grammy for best contemporary Christian music album with more 1.6 million records sold. Mandisa is a voice of encouragement in truth to people facing life's challenges all over the world. Mandisa it's been a delight to knowing you over the years and such a delight to have you here on Family Talk. Thank you for joining us.
- Mandisa: Thank you for having me. I like how you say my name. Mandisa. Sounds so epic when you say it.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, you just came off stage here at Extraordinary Women. It was wild out there. I could really feel the move of the Spirit of God. And you told your story that God's put in your heart and you're being really open and vulnerable. I think you probably shocked a few people. I think you encouraged a lot of people. You gave a lot of hope. Mandisa, when you look out over the crowd and there was a

lot of fun and laughter, behind their smiles, there's a lot of profound brokenness. What are you seeing out on the front lines?

Mandisa: Yeah. I used to be scared to talk about these things. I don't know where I came up with the idea that certain things cannot be said publicly, but I really went through it a few years ago. And as I started to talk about it, the deep darkness, I kept hearing from people saying, "I'm so glad to know I'm not the only one. That I have these kinds of thoughts too." And for some reason, just knowing that you're not alone in these struggles gives hope and encouragement to people. But what I'm seeing is that mental health is an issue that we have to address in the body of Christ. That it's not just unbelievers who battle with these things, but it's people who follow after Jesus. And I see that in the Bible. And so I don't think it is any surprise that we're seeing it today. So I'm so glad that people like you and organizations like yours are talking about it, because I really do think it's such an issue with us.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mandisa, everybody has a story. And as I read about your story, I thought, "Boy, I see her so different now." Will you mind taking us back and sharing a little bit about what it was like? You grew up in a broken home and you experienced a lot of childhood trauma.

Mandisa: I don't think I put it all together until I started my counseling journey. For me, it was just a matter of it is what it is. I grew up with a single mother and to be honest, so many of my friends did. So I didn't think it was anything extraordinary or that set me apart. And I've come to understand that the way that I felt about my father, and he's very much in my life, but he wasn't a constant, he wasn't in the same house as me. And then eventually he moved away to Texas. And so I would see him in the summers, but that sent a message of rejection. I think in the mind of a little child, that is not something that goes away without really digging into the root. And so, yes, I grew up that way. I also was molested as a little girl and was raped when I was 16.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I read about that.

Mandisa: And again, I just thought, "Well, this is just what it is." But one thing I remember as I was a 16-year-old and was being abused in that way, the man kept saying, "You're so beautiful." And so I think in my mind, I started to equate beauty with danger. And so I started really eating a lot. I've always struggled with my weight, but at that moment, something about packing on the pounds made me feel safe and protected. And to be honest, men weren't looking at me in the same way. And so I realize now it's more than just about dieting and exercise. It really is a root that I have to dig up that's been there for a long time.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You talked in the book about a lot of those experiences and the pain that went with it. You also talked about some turning points, some light that was starting to shine in the darkness and how God started doing work, but talk about when you came to know Christ.

Mandisa: It's interesting because I was raped in the fall when I'm was 16 years old. And I came to know Jesus just a few months after that. My mom had a coworker and she invited us to her church, was doing something called "The Singing Christmas Tree." And that is where I came to know the Lord. I grew up going to church every other weekend with my dad and my stepmom, but in that moment at 16 years old, and I think it had something to do with the pain that I had just gone through, I saw the story of Jesus in a different way. It felt more than just a story in a book. It felt personal. And I felt like the Holy Spirit was wooing me in that moment.

I've seen the pastor that gave the invitation, and I always joke and say, he tricked me because he just said, "If you want to invite Jesus into your heart, just lift your hand up." And so I felt a little bit sheepish I could do that. But then he said, "We want to invite you down. We have some information we want to give you." And my mom was sitting there and we didn't go to church together. But I felt in my heart that taking that step down that aisle was something that I wanted to proclaim. I was a little bit scared to do it, but that light that came into my life in that moment, just a few short months after the darkness that came, I think it's not a coincidence. And that's when I began reading my Bible and I started going to church a couple years after that. And that's when I really came to know Jesus, not just a man that I would read about in the Bible, but as a relationship.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And so in that journey, Mandisa, you keep going and God does something. He has given you a beautiful gift. And it's the gift of song. And in that, you started and had a couple of opportunities, which ultimately led you to American Idol. Can you just take us on a little bit of that journey?

Mandisa: Yeah. There's a man on American Idol called Simon Cowell, and Simon was known for saying the first thing-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Everybody knows Simon.

Mandisa: Yeah. He would say the first thing that come into his mind when he saw somebody. And so for years, I so scared to audition for fear that he would ridicule me. And so you can imagine how happy I was when I auditioned and he said the nicest things. He said that I had a beautiful face and that I was everything that he wanted me to be when I walked into the room. And so little did I know that he had some comments to say after I left the room. And so I found out when I watched the premiere episode of American Idol, and even looking back on that time, I just see how God was protecting me. Because as I was in a room full of my friends, we were having a big watch party, when I saw what Simon said about me and my weight. My friends immediately paused the TiVo, they gathered around me and they started to pray for me. And so the next time I saw Simon was about a week later, and I said to him, "Simon, I want you to know that you hurt my feelings and that I cried." But I said, "I forgive you." And I said, "The reason I can forgive you is that Jesus died so that all of my wrongs could be forgiven. I can extend that same grace to you."

Dr. Tim Clinton: Amen.

Mandisa: And the look on his face, he wasn't expecting that. He thought I was going to tell him off, but it was as if the Holy Spirit ushered into that room and I just felt him doing something. I went on and the show was great, but I look at that as probably the most important moment for me on that show, because I came to understand what God can do with a broken heart when you yield that to Him, how He can just make beauty from ashes. I didn't like the pain of it, but I see how God used it. And so it made it all worth it for me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mandisa, it was tough though.

Mandisa: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: How'd you get through all that? You're the spotlight, you're the conversation, and you continue to carry a lot of this. God was at work, but you had a lot of stuff that was going on still, that was going unresolved. There's a lot of mental health related stuff that continue to surge. Sometimes it comes like in waves. We go through moments of depression, maybe despair, anxieties, and more. What's interesting is at those times, we often press into people or we have someone we try to go to. You had a friend. Do you mind sharing a little bit about Keisha?

Mandisa: Keisha. Yeah. Right after American Idol, I recorded my first album and I started to do concerts. And so Keisha was probably the first person that I asked if she would sing with me. She had a beautiful voice and we were great friends. And she was also my hair stylist and we spent a lot of time together. And so she went off of the road with me for a time. She felt like she needed to devote some more time to her family. And it was in that period where she was doing my hair and she revealed to me that she was pregnant, which was such a praise report. But then she also said that she had felt a lump in her breast. And it turned out that she did have breast cancer. And so she was carrying her child while she was going through breast cancer treatments. And I really, really believed that God was going to heal her. I really did.

And so, when her son was born and he's beautiful and perfect, that was such a praise report, but she had one year with him before she passed away. And I had this anger that I felt like I couldn't express. I just stuffed it down, which is now I understand it's my default. It's what I've always done. And I went into the deepest depression. Looking back, I can say I've experienced depression, but that was I think the most hopeless that I have ever felt. And it did get to the point where I contemplated suicide and wanted to take my life because that pain was just more than I can bear. The disappointment that I felt was more than I can bear. And so, when I talk about the deep darkness I've experienced...

Dr. Tim Clinton: It was like a convergence almost of all this stuff, train wrecking together.

Mandisa: Absolutely.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And so when Keisha dies, all the grief, then the pain from the past trauma, shame you wrote about, overweight issues, feelings of failure and inadequacy. But I noticed that you began to talk about how you, when you're on the road, you try to white knuckle it, I guess, maybe through things and you began to struggle while you were on the road. Can you tell us about how difficult it really became?

Mandisa: I think because I got so used to masking things, so used to putting that smiling face around everyone... And so many of my songs are these encouraging anthems. "You're an overcomer and this is going to make you stronger." It was easy for me to put a smile on my face and then get back to my bunk on the bus afterwards and just be empty and feel dark again. And I didn't realize that there was some unresolved grief that I was feeling until Keisha passed away and I realized, "This isn't working. I keep having these mountaintop experiences and then I keep having these low valleys and I can't keep doing this." And so I went off of the road for a period, because I just felt like I couldn't pretend anymore. I just wanted to be alone. And my default is isolation. I pull away from people, including the Lord. It just makes me not want to be around anybody at all.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I think it's natural. I think when we feel like our world's out of control, we cut things off to "get control", which by the way, shuts down a lot of things that we need, like blood supply to help us, to breathe life into us. And the more we close people off or life off, the more we have to close it off. Next thing you know, you're all alone,

Mandisa: All alone.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hell loves to get us alone.

Mandisa: That's so true. Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Ain't that true?

Mandisa: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And when you're alone, you're easy prey.

Mandisa: Absolutely. You start listening to the-

Dr. Tim Clinton: To the lies.

Mandisa: ... whispers and it starts to become believable. Like it started with "God doesn't hear you." And then bit by bit, it turns into "God doesn't exist." Like it slowly starts getting darker and darker until you feel absolutely hopeless.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You talked earlier about getting to a place where it was dark enough that you felt like life probably would be better off without you. Mandisa, I mean, those are strong words. They're concerning words. In those moments, how did you pull yourself out?

Mandisa: My community. It was all of the text messages and the phone calls and some people were banging on my door and they went unanswered. I had to kind of do an apology tour after that because when you have somebody that you're reaching out to, and they're just getting silence, that's concerning for people, which is why they showed up at my door. But in that moment where I had the pills in my hands, it was them that I was thinking about, it was, "I can't do this to them." And it was thoughts of, I've been so vocal about my faith and to end it all like this, it just felt so wrong. And so that's who I was thinking about. It was those constant messages from people.

And so, I always encourage other people, when you have that little nudge, when somebody comes into your mind that you haven't thought about in maybe a long time, reach out, follow through with it and pray for them and let them know that you love them. Because even though those messages were going unanswered, I heard them. And it was those messages that had me not take that handful of pills.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mandisa, I want to stay here just for a moment because I want to make sure our listeners hear this. When you're hurting, the natural default is the distance, to move away. Zach, my son, calls those people you were talking about friends for the fire.

Mandisa: It's beautiful.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Friends for the fire, the ones who keep showing up. And I really believe it's about soul care ministry. I think God calls us to one another. That God has no greater plan than His people like you and me. And others who show up and they just say, "We're not going there. We're not doing that. I'm not going to let you do this."

Mandisa: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mandisa, at this moment right here, if there are people out there who are hurting and it's like they feel helpless, they feel hopeless. What do you say to them now?

Mandisa: First of all, I want people to know you're not alone. There is hope simply because you're still here. I have a song on my *Out Of The Dark* album called "I'm Still Here." And it says, "My heart is still beating and my lungs are still breathing. So, God is not done with me yet." And so, the fact that I'm still here, that He's still writing my story, that gives me hope and that I'm here for a purpose. And so that's why I'm talking about these things, is because I want people to know that

they're not alone. And then also, I want to encourage people to reach out. You don't even have to have a lot of people.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Support.

Mandisa: Absolutely.

Dr. Tim Clinton: This is important right here.

Mandisa: Reach out to somebody that you know is your person, reach out to anybody who you know loves you, and ask them to check on you. Give them a key to your house if need be. And then I encourage people... My counseling journey, it's still a journey. It's still one I'm very much in. It has helped me to unearth some things that I have not dealt with for a long time. And so my counselor helps me to identify things that I like to sweep under the rug and pretend they're not there and it can be hard sometimes. But that is how I know true healing is going to come about, is actually dealing with the ugly stuff that I try to keep hidden.

Dr. Tim Clinton: If you hear that noise in the background, we are backstage at the Extraordinary Women Conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma at the Mabee Center. Michael O'Brien's out on stage. 5,000 women out there getting after it, celebrating, praising God, worshipping Him and enjoying the weekend together. You have a lot of verses in your heart that you love. Psalm 34:18, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted."

Mandisa: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It meant a lot to you?

Mandisa: Absolutely. I felt brokenhearted. When Keisha passed away, it literally felt like a heart that was breaking in half. And knowing that that is when God draws the closest to us, that is such an encouragement to me, because He can feel so far. But the Word says that He is never closer than when your heart is broken.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I noticed when you spoke today, you went back to the Book of Genesis, one of my favorite verses, because it comes back to what we teach. It's called attachment theory or relationship psychology. "It's not good that man be alone."

Mandisa: Yeah. And that I've come to understand is so important for me to be with people, because that is where I often hear His voice the most. Is through the voice of my friends and my family around me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I wanted to ask you Mandisa, what have you learned about God through this whole journey?

Mandisa: I think the biggest thing is that He wants me to share the things with Him that I want to keep hidden. The anger and the hurt. I think my default was “I can't talk to God that way,” but as I read through the Psalms and I love David so much how he would just lay it all out there. And if he was a man after God's own heart, then that's what he wants for me. Like don't try to keep the broken, ugly things hidden. Give me all of that. And that's when I feel closest to Him, is when I'm weeping or crying or not even necessarily just all the joy moments, but the broken moments.

Dr. Tim Clinton: There's a working that begins to take place in our hearts because life's pretty brutal. There are going to be moments when it does get dark. But God wants to work in our hearts so that He can work in and through us. That's 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. He's father of mercies, the God of all comfort, who comforts us so that we in turn-

Mandisa: Can comfort others.

Dr. Tim Clinton: ... can comfort others with the comfort we ourselves are comforted by God.

Mandisa: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Ain't a beautiful verse?

Mandisa: I love that. Love that verse.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When I think about you and what you're doing now on tour a little bit and getting after it and your brand new book, it's a message that says, "Hey, God comforted me and I want to share that comfort with you." And then you want to call women and men to a ministry of caring for each other, soul care ministry.

Mandisa: I think the thing that I love the most about this book is the discussion questions that we have at the end of each chapter, because I really want to invite conversations about these issues. Yes, it tells my journey and I want people to find hope in it. More than anything, I want to build community around it. I want people to ask the tough questions and to be able to talk about some of the things that we maybe try to keep hidden from one another. I think that's probably the most important part of the book that I love the most.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I'm looking at part of the description of the book. It says, “if you found yourself in a dark place as the result of anxiety, grief, depression, or loss, Mandisa’s story will reassure you that even when you’re walking through the dark valleys, God can and will lead you on a path to joy and hope.”

Mandisa: Absolutely.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mandisa, you really believe that?

Mandisa: I do.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That God offers that, even when it's dark.

Mandisa: Yeah, especially when it's dark. I call Psalm 40 my life verse and it makes all of this worth. It's, "He lifted me out of the pit, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on a rock and gave me a new song to sing." And it's verse 3 that's my testimony, "Many will hear what God has done. They will be amazed and they will put their trust in Him." That's why I'm doing this, is because I want people to hear what God has done and to have a similar journey where He is the one that you're going to put your trust in.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mandisa, what does the future look like? What's on the horizon? Can you tip the hat a little bit to us?

Mandisa: Yeah. Well, I'm traveling a lot speaking about these issues and I have a podcast on AccessMore, also called *Out Of The Dark*, where we're discussing mental health issues and the body of Christ.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You partner up with a counselor, right?

Mandisa: Yeah. I'm so thankful because I felt like I kind of have been coming as the person who's experiencing this, but she's a licensed professional counselor, but she also has her own counseling journey. And so it feels like we're able to both discuss from the point of view of somebody who is getting counseling themselves, but she's a professional. So I'm so glad that I've got her with me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mandisa, I'd love to close our time together this way: "Overcomer," the song. Tell us about how you wrote it, where it came from? And by the way, what it meant to you and what it means to you now?

Mandisa: Well, my friend Keisha, who I talked about earlier, she was the inspiration behind "Overcomer." As she was getting her cancer treatments and pregnant, I wanted a song to help her stay in the fight till the final round. And so that is how "Overcomer" was birthed. I really wanted a song to be her fight song. And so as you can imagine, when she passed away and her story ended differently than I wanted it to, it took on kind of a different meaning for me. And now I think about Revelation 12:11. It says, "They overcame by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony." And I always leave the back part of that verse out, but it says, "They did not love their life so much as to fear death." And that's Keisha's story.

She did overcome, not necessarily in the way that I thought here on earth, but she didn't give up everything because she feared death. She kept fighting on. And so that is the testimony. When I sing that so on now, I want people to know Keisha did overcome, and so am I. It's a journey. It's one step at a time, but I'm an overcomer because that's who God says that I am.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Our special guest today on family talk has been Mandisa. Brand new book out. Boy, you want to get your hands on this. *Out of the Dark: My Journey Through the Shadows to Find God's Joy*. Hey, on behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the team at Family Talk. Mandisa, it was so great to have you on here. We salute you. Pray that God will just for such a time as this, just give your voice a lift that brings great glory and praise to our God.

Mandisa: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Thank you for joining us.

Mandisa: Thank you so much.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Here's "Overcomer."

Mandisa: (singing). "You're an overcomer. Stay in the fight till the final round. You're not going under; cause God is holding you right now. You might be down for a moment, feeling like it's hopeless, that's when He reminds you, that you're an overcomer. You're an overcomer, you're an overcomer."

Roger Marsh: That was "Overcomer" by Mandisa. I'm Roger Marsh. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. She's been sharing her story of being an overcomer with our co-host Dr. Tim Clinton. I love that Mandisa's testimony and mission comes straight out of Scripture, specifically out of Psalm 40:3, which says, "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in Him." Mandisa's new book is called *Out of the Dark: My Journey Through the Shadows to Find Joy*. If you'd like to learn more about Mandisa, her music, her ministry, or how you can get a copy of her book, visit drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. That's drjamesdobson.org/broadcast.

If you're in need of prayer today, please give us to call at (877) 732-6825. There are Family Talk team members available 24/7 to take your call, to answer your questions about the JDFI, and to pray with and for you. And it's no inconvenience at all. We really do want to hear from you. Again, our number is (877) 732-6825. And be sure to join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. May God continue to richly bless you and your family.

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