



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: When God Doesn't Appear to Make Sense to Us – Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. James Dobson

Air Date: July 19, 2023

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello, everyone, you're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson and thank you for joining us for this program.

Roger Marsh: There comes a time when all of us will deal with questions like “why is this happening to me?” Or, “why does my faith feel like it's fading?” But the good news is there is hope for those challenging times. And we're going to hear more about that right now on this special edition of Family Talk with your host, psychologist, and bestselling author, Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: We began our program yesterday with a discussion of one of my books called *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. I was explaining that there are times when we as Christians encounter questions that trouble us deeply, I call them the “why” questions which simply do not have easy answers. You can talk to theologians for weeks and you can study the Scriptures for years and not fully understand everything that takes place in your life and why God lets certain things happen to us. The truth is that God rarely provides simple answers to difficult questions, to what we call imponderables. I'd like to pick up with what the Scripture tells us about unanswered questions. This is what I said to about 150 staff members who had joined me when I was president of Focus on the Family. That was before I formed a new ministry called Family Talk. So with that let's pick up with part two of this discussion.

When I was in Scotland with Shirley a year ago, we just went back and forth through those Scriptures. What I'm talking about is not hidden in Scripture, it is laid out there for you to see and explained rather well. Do you understand that nearly all the Bible characters went through this? I mean, they all did. Look at John the Baptist. Jesus said of John the Baptist that he was the greatest man born of woman. That's quite an accolade coming from Jesus. And there he is sitting in a prison, a Roman prison, and that fatuous woman, Herodias, who was in an adulterous affair with her brother-in-law is about to have him beheaded? How's he going to explain that? I mean, we read it without passion now. And so John is there and then he's beheaded and his head's brought in and we go on to the next verse. How would you have felt if you were sitting there?

And what really encourages me is that John reacted in much the same way you or I would. You remember what he did? He wrote Jesus a note, had it smuggled out, and delivered to him. And the note said ... What'd the note say? "Are you the Messiah or do we look for someone else?" Have you ever asked that question? Have you ever come up to the betrayal barrier and asked, "Are you really God? Are you there?" In the book of Acts we got one sentence about the apostle James. Here he is one of Jesus 12 and it said Herod had him executed. Look in the Old Testament of Joseph, his entire life is a shambles. I mean, it all went out of control. His family hated him, his father's lied to, he's shipped off to Egypt which would be like us going to Russia, he's in a Egyptian prison. Potiphar's wife lies on him. I mean, everything goes wrong.

Now we read the final story and we see that God was doing something. He's a type of Christ, he was symbolic of the Christ to come. His life was symbolic. There was a purpose, there was a plan but it didn't make any sense to Joseph. And there's no indication whatsoever that God came and sat down with Joseph and said, "Now I'm really doing something wonderful in your life. I know it's kind of difficult for a while but boy, you ought see how it's going to turn out." See, He didn't do that, He allowed Joseph to live it one day at a time like He does you and me. And, of course, Abraham, given the promised child, all the future depended on Isaac. The promises that God had given him could not be fulfilled without Isaac. And God says, "Kill Isaac." God contradicts God. God doesn't make sense. And Abraham did it anyway, or at least he would have.

The best example, and the one that's most often quoted, of course, is Job who went through all these things. He lost his wealth, lost his health, lost his family, lost his farm, lost his reputation, lost his friends, lost everything. What amazes me is that those were not the events in his life that frustrated him the most, he coped with that very well. "Naked I came into the world, naked I leave. Blessed be the name of the Lord. The Lord giveth the Lord taketh away." Man, what a man of faith. Lost all of that and he's not complaining.

But he finally hit the wall. And do you remember what it was that pushed him over the edge? It's that he went through a time when God wouldn't talk to him. And he searched for him. He said, "I looked for him in the north country and I looked for him in the South. If I could find his throne I could go and I could plead my case but I can't find him. He would understand but I can't find him." God wouldn't talk to him. Let me read to you what I wrote there. "Are we to assume that this inability to find and communicate with God in certain times of personal crisis was unique to Job? No, I believe it occurs in many other cases, perhaps to the majority of us at some point in life."

"Scripture tells us that no temptation has seized you except what is common to man." That's 1 Corinthians 10:13. "So we all go through similar experiences. King David must have felt like Job when he asked the Lord with great passion, 'How long oh Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?'" Okay, we got Job saying that, and now we got David saying that. In the 77th Psalm, David again expressed the anguish of his soul. "Will the Lord reject

forever? Will He never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever?" We're told in 2 Chronicles 32:31 that "God left Hezekiah to test him and to know everything that was in his heart." There are a number of illustrations in the Bible where the Lord allows you to go through these times where you don't hear from Him.

And why? I think it's very clear in Scripture and it has to do with faith. It is the highest priority in God's scheme of values. It is believing when nothing makes sense. It is holding on, it is keeping your faith. It is perseverance when you can't figure it out. See, that's what He said about Thomas. See, Thomas wanted to put his hand in the wounds and in the side and he said, "Blessed are those that have not seen and have believed." Even when God does not talk back, even when you can't see Him or feel Him and you have no sensory awareness of His presence, He is close enough to touch. He never leaves. He promised that. And His promises are the only thing in life you can really count on. He is always right there.

Now, I wrote a book a number of years ago called *Emotions: Can You Trust Them?* And I spent 200 pages to say, "No." You can't trust your emotions. They fool you when you are tired, they lie to you. They lie to you sometimes when you're not tired. They tell you things that are not true. They tell you you are disliked and hated when that's not true. They tell you you are worthless when that is not true. Emotions are very unreliable, they fluctuate. You cannot base it on what you feel you've got to base it on this word. And His word says, "He sticks closer than a brother. He is always right there." You stand on the promises, you do not depend on your own emotions. And when you hit the turbulence and horror seeps into your lives, hang onto your faith with the tenacity of a bulldog. Don't let go of it and don't depend on validation from what you feel because your feelings are wounded at that time. They don't work, they lie to you, they give you misinformation.

I'll give you a classic example from Scripture. Jesus had been crucified, a horrible thing for the disciples. They saw the Messiah that for three years they'd heard say these magnificent things, and there was such hope, and He was going to bring the kingdom of God right there on earth, and He was going to lead in an insurrection of the Roman government. He was going to do all these things. They see Him hanging naked on a cross saying, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" By the way, Jesus asked the same question we asked. It's universal. Even Jesus asked the question, "Why, why?" Well, they see this happen and they see Him die. And a Roman soldier thrust the spear, and He's dead, and they take Him off the cross and they put Him in a rich man's tomb, and it's over.

And how do they make sense out of their situation? So the disciples are walking along the road to am Emmaus, and they're talking about all that's happened, and they're discouraged as they can be, and their lives are probably in danger, and there's no way they can put the pieces together. And we find out a few verses later that Jesus was walking right along with them, and they were about

to get the best news that's ever been given to mankind in the history of the world, it would turn the world upside down and reach 2,000 years down to our day. That was right around the corner to two depressed men for whom nothing made sense. We know now and made perfect sense. It all fit together. It was a perceptual problem, they couldn't see it. They had no indication at all that Jesus was even in their part of the universe, and He was walking right along beside them.

That's what I'm talking about. Your inability to see it doesn't mean a thing. Your feelings don't matter one whit. When you feel like God is not even in your state and He doesn't care about you, it is of no significance, no consequences, stand on the word because that's what you can count on. In fact, he says, "Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not upon your own understanding." Good, you read the Scripture. Do you hear what that says? It doesn't say don't try to understand. He said, "Don't what?" Don't lean on it.

What does leaning on it mean? It means demanding of God. It means saying, "If you don't give me answers to this I'm not going to serve you, I'm not going to love you." It means if I don't hear from you by tomorrow I'm through with you. That's leaning on your own understanding. That's trying to make sense out of it, you can't do it. There will be situations where you will not be able to make sense out of it. Even in life-and-death situations which look where ... It looks like things are totally out of control, God's timing is perfect. It's always perfect.

The best illustration of that is a story that I love about Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus, and they were Jesus best friends. They were closer to being His family really than His own family. And when He was in their community, he stayed with them. And they had a bonding, they had a love for one another. So it was perfectly reasonable for Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus to believe that if they ever had a crisis, this Messiah, who did all these miracles, would use that power to help them because He loved them. Doesn't that make sense? And so the crisis occurred and Lazarus comes down with a terrible illness. We don't know what he had but it was very alarming. And we know that it was serious because it eventually took his life.

And so Mary writes a little note and she sends it to Jesus and says, "Jesus, the one you love is ill" and sends it to Him. And I'm sure that Mary and Martha believed that Jesus would come back down the road pretty quick. Now, the Bible doesn't say this but I imagine they sat at the window and watched for Him, don't you? Isn't that what you would do? Jesus is out there healing all those people He doesn't even know, He's doing these miracles for folks, He's raising the dead. I mean, He's doing wonderful things and now they have a need. And they've ministered to Him, and they've fed Him, and they've befriended Him, and it is very logical for them to say, "Jesus, now we really need some help. Lazarus is sick and we know you love him." So they sat and waited for Him and He didn't come. And Lazarus is getting sicker and sicker.

The Bible again doesn't say this but don't you imagine there were some discussion that went on about that? And Mary and Martha are saying, "I don't understand. Did they deliver the message? Did He get it? What did He say when the messenger gave Him the note? Did He say He would come? Does He really know? Maybe He doesn't know Lazarus is so sick." And they wait for Him and they wait for Him and Lazarus continues to sink. And then you know the story, Lazarus dies and they have the funeral. A very sad moment. They loved their brother. And Jesus didn't attend the funeral.

And finally Jesus shows up four days late. Now, I don't mean any disrespect, and you know how I love the scriptures and you know how I love the Lord, but isn't it reasonable to think that Mary and Martha would've been a little bit angry at Jesus over that? "Thanks a lot, Jesus, you come four days late where were you? Four days ago you could've saved our brother, and now he's dead, and it's too late, and you could have done it. And where were you? Don't you love us?" I imagine there was some feeling there. They wouldn't have been human if there was not. But Jesus saw their pain, and He was deeply touched, and He wept, and He went in and He raised Lazarus from the dead.

And you see, He was not late at all, all of that was planned. It was done to glorify God, and it happened exactly the way God wanted it to. He was not late. He's not late in your life. But I tell you this much, and again I don't mean any disrespect, it does seem to me like Jesus shows up about four days late in my life. Have you had that experience? Have you ever walked the halls of a hospital and you hear the baby crying next door and you ask, "Where is Jesus?" And he hasn't arrived? And you look out the front door and in the path, you go in a little prayer room and you say, "Where is He?" And you get the feeling that it's out of control and that He's hopelessly late. But His timing is always absolutely perfect. It's done for His purposes.

I have had some experiences in my life where He seemed disastrously late. Some of you are aware that I served on the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography in 1985 and '86. 15 months of the most miserable experience of my life. I flew back and forth across the country and looked at the most wretched material that's known to mankind. When we were finished with that, and we issued our final report, some of you are aware that we were hit with a \$30 million lawsuit by the American Magazine Association, Penthouse, and Playboy Magazines. I don't know where they thought \$30 million was going to come from but it was a scary moment. We talked to the Justice Department attorneys and they said, "There's no problem. This is so phony, this is pulled out of the air. There's no case, it'll be thrown out of court." It wasn't. It was assigned to one of the most liberal judges in the northeast, a man named Judge Penn who held it on his desk for two years and kept us in limbo.

And Shirley and I did some praying at that time. We said, "Lord, I got this ministry to run and it's a busy time I don't need this drain on my life. I don't need this threat hanging over me and I don't need to be involved in all that a lawsuit implies. Remove it from us." And Jesus didn't show up. And the judge

finally ruled in our favor, and they appealed, and went to the next level, and it went to the next level, and the next level. Six years later that wound up at the Supreme Court who threw it out and it was finally over, and Jesus arrived, and Lazarus was resurrected. Why did I have to go through those six years? With a word from Him that could have been removed from me. Where was Jesus? Why was He late? Well, I don't know. I still can't answer that, I just know He wasn't late, He arrived right on time for His purposes.

Finally, and we will conclude with this. Is that the imagery that we are given in this book, in the Word of God, is of God being like a father who loves us infinitely more than we love our own children? Psalms 103 says, "As a father pities his child so the Lord pities those that fear Him." Now, that's imagery that I can get my hands on. I can understand that. I know how I feel about Danae and Ryan, I'd lay down my life instantly for either one of those kids. And if God loves me infinitely more than I can love Danae and Ryan, then I have a sense for what He is feeling when we go through that. He is there.

Some of you have heard me share this illustration. Forgive me if you have but I'll conclude with it. When Ryan was three years old, he had a terrible ear infection one day, he woke up with this awful pain in his ear. And Shirley took him to see our local pediatrician who was a very grouchy man, he was an older man. He had very little tolerance for parents and none for toddlers. I don't know why he was a pediatrician. Anyway, that was the line of work that he went into.

So he examined Ryan who was scared to death to be in that office, and looked in Ryan's ear, and he told Shirley that the only way that they could deal with the infection that had adhered itself to his eardrum was to go in there with a wicked little pick device and pull it away from the eardrum. You've had a child that's had that happen? Oh, it's happened to you. You know a little bit about how Ryan felt about that. He was only three and he didn't know much about medical language but he got enough of that story to understand what was coming and he went into orbit.

So the doctor said to Shirley, "I want you to hold Ryan down, hold him on this table while I go into that ear." He asked the wrong lady to do that because Shirley's a mama and you know how she feels about Ryan and Danae. And she tried. She got a hold of Ryan and she tried to hold him and the doctor started to go into the ear. Ryan, he's hyperactive anyway and he came unglued and Shirley couldn't hold him. So the pediatrician chewed her out and said, "If you can't do it, go get your husband." So I was in the neighborhood and Shirley went and got me. And I came in and he explained what he was going to do. I gulped real hard, and put Ryan up on this table, and wrapped my 6'2", 200-pound frame around this little three year old. And the doctor went in there, into that ear, and Ryan again just screamed to high heaven. What it does to a parent to have a child scream.

Anyway, I got ahold of him and I finally held him down long enough for them to pull that infection from the ear. But the problem was that Ryan was laying on

this examining table and there was a mirror on the backside of that. And I had his back to me as I held him and he could look right from that mirror into my eyes and he was talking to me with those eyes. He was not using words he was screaming but his eyes were saying something to me. They were saying, "You of all people. You my daddy are doing this to me. Why are you letting this man hurt me? Why?" It was betrayal. Ryan was betrayed. It was not just the pain, but the one that he has always depended on, the one who has loved him and been there was the one that was hurting him and he couldn't understand that. And it wounded me as I looked into his eyes.

And after that experience was over, and after all the emotion had settled down and I thought about it, I thought that must be the way the Lord feels when we go through those crises. See, I could not explain to Ryan in his language why it was necessary for him to go through this. I couldn't tell him and make him believe I was doing it for his good. That this pain was necessary and that it would be much worse if we didn't do it. I couldn't tell him the rationale behind it because he couldn't comprehend it. I could explain it he couldn't understand it.

And I realized that there must be times in my agony before God where I say, "Why? Lord, you of all people why would you let me go through this? Why would you hurt me? Why would you let me experience pain?" And in my humanness, He cannot explain to me why I have to endure this. But as a father pities his child, the Lord pities those that fear Him. And I believe He hurts far more than I was hurting with Ryan when we go through that. He is there, He understands. You can trust God even when you can't track Him, and God makes sense even when He doesn't make sense.

Well, this is James Dobson again and we've been listening for the last two days to a recording that was made some years ago about the subject when God doesn't make sense. You have probably experienced such a moment in your own life, most of us do. I would say all of us do. I ask you, did it trouble you spiritually and theologically that you couldn't nail down all the things that didn't quite fit for you? That's what we want to prevent, and that's why we're talking about this subject today because God loves you and He sees every tear that falls. Roger Marsh close out the program.

Roger Marsh:

Well, I will be happy to Dr. Dobson. On today's edition of Family Talk, we have been listening to part two of our three-part series on this vital topic of staying strong in our faith when God doesn't make sense. Now, that is the title of Dr. Dobson's best-selling book on this subject, and there's a copy for you in our resource center. It's easy to order when you visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of our series on dealing with the pressures of life when God doesn't make sense. That's on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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