



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Living with the Strong-Willed Child- Part 3

Guest(s): Joy Solomon, Debra Merritt, Kristen Walker, and Lizz Walker

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk, which is a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm your host, Dr. James Dobson. I'm so pleased that you've joined us today. If you've been listening in the last two days this is the third day of a discussion wherein, we're revisiting some classic parenting advice through my conversation with three mothers of strong-willed children. I enjoyed some of the humor and some of the crazy stories that's been shared in these first two programs. It's going to happen again today. But this is a serious problem that parents face. These women speak from experience. I hope all of you listening can learn from what they've seen and what they've heard, and what they've experienced along the way through their own parenting years. Our guest panel included Joy Solomon, and Debra Merritt, and Kristen Walker, and her daughter, Lizz, was with us too. These are all tough God-fearing moms who are expert parents. But there's a lot of content to get through today. Here now is the remainder of the broadcast we're titling, "Living with a Strong-Willed Child."

Joy, let's go back to your story. We began talking about the details of Dana's early childhood. You said that after a period of time, you began praying for her, you and your husband, Davey, laying hands on her at night when she was asleep and praying that the Lord would help bring that will under subjection and into control. Eventually, that happened. You said, for about four/five years, she was able to control it, still had the will, but able to control it. Then, she went into adolescence, and it got worse than that-

Joy Solomon: It was what we refer to as the dark period. She was very unhappy with herself. She was not happy with her personal appearance. She was a heavy child. She had very, very, very curly hair, which no one else in our family has. She was very intelligent. Combined with my personality, unhappy with my looks unhappy with my intelligence, she decided she was going to change that and got into a group of acquaintances that said, "Well, your parents are still trying to control you. Your parents don't really want you to be happy. Your parents want to live your life for you. They don't want you to leave home." And found a young man, a boyfriend, who told her everything she wanted to hear. "You're wonderful, but your parents don't understand you. Because she was so needy in that area, she was totally addicted to that relationship.

I think, when we talked back in February, you asked me if she had gotten into drugs and alcohol. I said, "I did not think so." But I don't know that we truly ever believe how far down things go as parents. We only know what they share with us. You said, "Well, we need to thank God for that." And I said, "We do." But when your child is addicted to a relationship, nobody's helping. I would call these centers and counseling centers, and they would say, "Well, just tell her she can't see him. But there's really nothing we can do about that." It was as destructive a relationship as she could have been involved in.

Dr. James Dobson: How long did it go on?

Joy Solomon: Two and a half years.

Dr. James Dobson: During that time, what were you doing?

Joy Solomon: Crying every day. School didn't matter. Sorry.

Dr. James Dobson: That's all right.

Joy Solomon: She would have lost her relationship with her family and with God. School didn't matter. Soccer didn't matter, which had been a tremendous part of her life. The only thing that she could see in her future was that young man. She totally built her future life around it. Her total existence depended on him.

Dr. James Dobson: Were you fasting and praying during that time? Did you ever try fasting?

Joy Solomon: We tried everything. We tried fasting. We tried praying. We were doing the counseling. I was working with a Christian outlet store. People would come in, wonderful people, and they would say, "How are you doing today?" And I would say, "Fine, thanks. How are you?" One of the problems we had with Dana was lying constantly about everything. I was so convicted in that moment. I thought, "I lie every day. Every time I tell somebody that we're doing wonderfully, thanks, I'm lying." I turned around, and I looked at that person, and I said, "I'm sorry. I'm not trying to burden you. But I need to tell you I'm not okay. I'm losing a child." I'm sorry.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, Joy.

Joy Solomon: "I'm losing much hope." And I said, "I need your prayers. If you could just cover my child and my family with your prayers." We had more people write her name down. We spelled her name unusually. They would say, "How do you spell that?" They would write her name down. These are people that I will probably never meet again on earth.

Dr. James Dobson: Who were out there praying for you.

Joy Solomon: They said, "I will lift your child up." I would estimate hundreds and hundreds of people. Every time someone would ask me that question, "How are you doing today?" I'd say, "Better, but we're struggling. Let me tell you what we're going through." I have a dear friend who was struggling with similar situations. She came in one day, and she said, "Well, maybe you should share that because that might embarrass Dana." And I said, "You don't understand. I'm losing my child. I am so frightened that something tragic could happen before we turn her around before God gets a hold of her heart, and we could lose her forever." I didn't want to embarrass her. That wasn't my goal, but I wanted to save her.

Dr. James Dobson: There are so many parents out there that have been through this or are right there at this time, who are crying with us today because they're experiencing this same thing. Good solid Christian parents that would give their lives in a heartbeat for those kids. They've done everything they know to do, and they can't fix it. But the Lord still hears and answers prayer. Joy, He was hearing all that time.

Joy Solomon: All of them. Every one of them. The people that carried my child to the mercy seat, I can never thank them enough. They're there are no words because the relationship we have with that child now is so much better than I ever imagined when she was a child.

Dr. James Dobson: That's why we're here because there is hope. As a matter of fact, the day that we met, Joy, you took a little piece of paper out of your purse.

Joy Solomon: I did.

Dr. James Dobson: I don't think you knew you were going to share that with me that day.

Joy Solomon: No, I idea.

Dr. James Dobson: And just happened to have it with you, and you read it to me.

Joy Solomon: Well, I didn't just happen... I take it everywhere I go.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you really?

Joy Solomon: I keep this with me. It is such a reminder.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. Dayna is now in college.

Joy Solomon: She is in college.

Dr. James Dobson: She's just finished her first year. This was mid-year.

Joy Solomon: This was-

Dr. James Dobson: It's her first year away from home.

Joy Solomon: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And she wrote this note to you.

Joy Solomon: She did.

Dear mom: Hey there. This is going to be a weird letter. I've been doing a lot of lifelong thinking. Mom, sometimes I wonder where I would be and what life would be like if I hadn't come back from the dark side. I never thought that I would consider my mother to be my best friend, but you are. There are still some things that are more Rachel subjects, which is another of her good friends, but I would never try this closeness of gained with you for anything in the world. You and dad used to say that if I would just wait until it was time for me to move out that you would be behind me 100%. Now, I understand.

I know that you and I were growing even when I was at home, but I don't think that I ever truly appreciated you until now, at least not as much as you deserve to be appreciated. I miss you every day. I mean, I thought that when I went to school that I would never want to go home or even call. But I don't like to go through the day without talking to you. I hope that one day I will be as successful as daddy. I want to be as keen and respected in my field as he is in his. But you, above all, had the hardest profession of all. You had to raise me. Mama, I hope that you understand what a gift God gave you. He gave you the will and the power to raise me. You showed me the kinds of things that no college or professional school could ever teach me. I can only pray that one day God will make me the kind of mother you have been and will always be to me. I just wanted to take a minute to say thank you, and I love you. Your baby girl, Dana.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, Joy. That's worth a million bucks. Would you have ever believed that you would get a letter like that-

Joy Solomon: No.

Dr. James Dobson: ...when you were in the-

Joy Solomon: Never.

Dr. James Dobson...: ...heat of the battle.

Joy Solomon: Satan sends his little guards, his little demons, to sit on your shoulder. I would just keep lifting up the Bible quote, "Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The little demon would go, "Yeah, but Moses was 120 when he died. You don't have that much time." You do.

Dr. James Dobson: He's just lying to you.

Joy Solomon: You just question. You know that maybe she will come back to the word because of how you've raised her in the later years. But you wonder if you're ever going to have that opportunity to have the relationship with your child that maybe you have with your mother. My mother was one of my best friends. I thought I was going to lose all those years.

Dr. James Dobson: Never would have it. Lizz, do you sense a mother's heart here?

Lizz Walker: Yes, very much.

Dr. James Dobson: As what you've heard today? Can you imagine the depth of pain? Do you want to be a mother someday?

Lizz Walker: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Can you imagine bringing a child into the world as dedicated to that baby as you will be, and then have this kind of conflict take place?

Lizz Walker: I'm sure it'll happen. I know mom's going to be the first one I run to. It's going to be, "Mom, what'd you do to me? What'd you do?" I mean, seriously, every mother that's going to be almost becomes her mother. I do want to say one thing just about the strong-willed children is that they're raised so long with their families. God has this amazing way of just saying, "I want you. I want you to be strong-willed for me." I think probably at about the same time is when we have been strong-willed for so long. Then, God just grabbed us and said, "You know what? I want you. I want you to love me. Instead of being strong-willed for being rebellious and for disobedience be strong-willed for me." I think-

Dr. James Dobson: Remember that actually happening? Those thoughts?

Lizz Walker: Absolutely. I went out with a bunch of my friends, and I was being stupid. I had come home, and then I just sat down. I just felt the presence of God. I looked at myself, and I was like, "My life has been pointless. I've spent all of my life being strong-willed in wanting to win a battle." Then, God just grabbed me and was like, "Leave it behind, Lizz."

Dr. James Dobson: Kristen, you were praying for Lizz, weren't you?

Kristen Walker: Oh, I am a lot like Joy. We had family. Her grandparents have been faithful prayers. Rich and I pray for her. Everybody we know... We have not hidden from her the fact that she has been a strong-willed child. It is not necessarily an uncommon topic of conversation among people that we have dealt with this. Yes, we've had a lot of people praying as well. I am really blessed in the fact that I have seen what God can do and still have time with my daughter to build the relationship that every parent wants. So, I do cry.

Dr. James Dobson: Debra, you were praying, too, I'm sure.

Debra Merritt: Oh, yes. We had a similar experience last summer. Chrissy had just gone crazy. I think she had a relationship with somebody that I didn't even know about it. It wasn't probably as deep as where Dana went, but it was wrong. She was hurting from that. She was talking to her sister, and she came home, and she was rebellious and angry with me. And we, I listened to her scream at me until about two o'clock in the morning for no reason. All of a sudden, it was like the Holy Spirit came over her. She started repeating things that I would have said to her if I had been talking.

She says, "Mom. She says, "I will fight a battle all the way because I want to win." She says, "Don't ever be scared to put boundaries in my way. She says, "I need rules. I need boundaries, and I respect everything you've done to put those in my way."

Dr. James Dobson: Isn't that amazing?

Debra Merritt: Then, she said something else. She says, "I know who I am in God. I know that I will make right choices." She says, "I've had a bad year. I'm going to change this next year." She has. She's a different person this year. But she says, "You have trained me well. You have given me the stability of a Christian school and a church and a Christian family." She says, "I will choose wisely. I want to live my life because you've modeled it for me with Jesus."

Dr. James Dobson: I'm telling you. There is hope here. That's the reason I wanted to do this program. We're not here to bemoan the struggles of parenting. We're here to talk about getting hold of that relationship with the Lord and calling on him to help you in the difficult times. I want to ask you all a very key question. The scripture says that children are a blessing from the Lord. Do you still feel that way even in those situations where there is a struggle? Was it worth it? You've invested years and years in these kids. Tell me if it is still a blessing.

Joy Solomon: Your children are a treasure. I told my children when they were young. I don't think I ever said, "You're a gift from God," specifically, over and over. But my phrase was, "You are a treasure." For a while, Dana forgot that. I don't think she believed it. I think in her heart-

Dr. James Dobson: She was hurting, too.

Joy Solomon: She was hurting, and she didn't believe it. Now, I think she is to the point where she understands she truly is a treasure to us. The strong will that she has, the part of that that is good, I think it will take her far in life. She wants to be an attorney. I think it'll be a wonderful... because she'll argue with a rock. "You're not really a rock. What made you think you were rock? You're compressed sand. You're not a rock." She would argue as long as the day is long.

Dr. James Dobson: The Lord's going to use that-

Joy Solomon: I believe he will.

Dr. James Dobson: ...in her adult life.

Joy Solomon: I believe he certainly will. And yes, there are times that I wish we had not experienced what we experienced. But would I ask for everything to go away? No, because I will never take for granted that my children are going to be obedient, that my children are going to do the things that I want them to do, that my children are just automatically going to want the relationship with me. The fact that we have them now, I am so blessed.

Dr. James Dobson: How about the other two?

Kristen Walker: Worth every minute, every battle, every ounce of energy that I put into it. I would never, never trade anything.

Dr. James Dobson: Debra?

Debra Merritt: When I named my children, one of their names means house of God. One means great woman of God, and two mean precious gift of God. I did tell them that they were gifts. I didn't know if I could have children. They were all tremendous miracles and blessings. Absolutely. Absolutely. Every minute is worth it. Even the conflicts because I know that God is sufficient. I know He's able. I know He's going to use them mightily.

Dr. James Dobson: Anybody can raise an easy kid. It's duck soup. There are some that are tougher than others. You need to have that attitude. "The Lord gave me this child for a purpose. I'm the mold, and shape this youngster, and prepare him or her for a life of service to Him. I'm not going to let Satan have that will, and I'm up to the task. I'm going to make it. With the Lord's help. I'm going to make it." You're fighting to save the child. Right, ladies?

Debra Merritt: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: That's what you were doing. You are not going to let Satan have that kid. It is cowardly to give up. You hang in there, and you do what's right, even when the youngster looks at you. You've stayed up half the night when they're sick. You've done everything you could to clothe and care for this kid. And he or she looks you in the eye and says, "I hate you. I hate you. Get out of my life." The temptation to be cowardly in a moment like that is great. But you got to keep your courage and not yield to the temptation to give it back in the same measure.

Joy Solomon: We were at home one day out on the deck. We were just sitting there, and Dana said, "Why did you never give up?" I said, "Because you're a tressure. God gave

you to us. We would never." I can't imagine that things could have gotten a lot worse, but they could still go downhill. I said, "I could never have given up on you." And she said, "A lot of people would." And I said, "Not if they believed in the power of God and the power of prayer because I wasn't sure how soon it was going to be. But I always believed that you would come back." Hope and faith, tremendous for me.

Dr. James Dobson: That's what kept you strong, wasn't it?

Joy Solomon: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Is your faith? How do parents make it you don't have it?

Joy Solomon: I don't know. I don't know how parents make it without supportive husbands or wives. Davey said before we came in, he said, "If you have a strong-willed child, it takes a strong-willed mother and a strong-willed father to survive."

Dr. James Dobson: It does. I feel badly for those single mothers out there-

Joy Solomon: I can't imagine.

Dr. James Dobson: ...who are trying to handle this on their own because the deeper voice and the presence of a man is just made for those situations.

Joy Solomon: Well, Dana shared a story, she was just home for two weeks between spring and summer semester. She said, "I remember one night it was really, really bad. There was a big fight." She said, "I was just used to you crying because you do it all the time." I am a crier. I am a very emotional person. She said, "I made daddy cry."

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, my. That got to her.

Joy Solomon: Her father's tears.

Debra Merritt: We're still...

Joy Solomon: I'm choking everybody up.

Dr. James Dobson: Debra, what advice do you have for the mother who's out there feeling what you were feeling when your kids are small?

Debra Merritt: Well, I think what I'm going to do is quote your book. I think it's page 24 of *The Strong-Willed Child*. You said, "Pick your battles when decisively, take two aspirin and call me in the morning." I think that's-

Dr. James Dobson: Do all that, but don't call me.

Debra Merritt: I think I lived on your broadcasts when my children were little. I used to wash my floors and pick up the food that had been thrown on the floor while they were eating. I would sob through the broadcasts, but it helped me because I knew there were other people struggling. I knew that God was in control, and I knew there were people out there that understood. Now, I go to people like Kristen because we share an office together. We talk about our strong-willed daughters. We pray for you very regularly. We watch you, and we love you, and we nurture you together.

Dr. James Dobson: But that's what we're here for. Had a reporter here yesterday. I don't know that she's a Christian. I didn't have any indication that she was. But she said to me, "Why don't you do this? You've said that you care about all those people out there. Why have you invited hundreds of thousands of people every month to bring their troubles here? Why do you put yourself through this?" And I said, "This is the essence of my Christian faith. Jesus says, 'In as much as you do it under the least of these, my brothers, you do it unto me.' When you put an arm around a mom out there who's depressed, and discouraged, and hopeless to express this kind of expectation for the future and this kind of hope. It gives me a great deal of satisfaction." As I talked, she got big tears in her eyes. Debra, I'm pleased that you were touched by this ministry at a time when you needed it. Adolescence is tough any way you slice it. But there are answers. Of course, the Lord is there. Anything else you all want to share? Lizz, any last thing you want to say?

Lizz Walker: I just want to tell everybody that strong-willed children grow up and they mature and they learn. God does do that for them, I think. Even when we're being strong-willed, we are in God's arms.

Dr. James Dobson: You're going to make a great mom. You are. You're going to make a great mother. I can just see it. You're very bright, and you're very dedicated. The fact that you've landed on your feet this early is a very good sign. I trust that you have a good year in school next year, and get on into college and write your mom an email that will make her cry because she's not a crier. I bet you could make her cry.

Thank you, ladies, for being with us. It's been wonderful to have a chance to talk to you for these three days. Thank you for sharing from your heart. Joy, you brought a Bible with you. That's been your mainstay.

Joy Solomon: It has.

Dr. James Dobson: The others love you, too, I see. Well, come back and see us when you've got grandkids that are strong-willed children. We'll talk about it some more. Thanks for being with us.

Joy Solomon: Thank you.

Kristen Walker: Thank you.

Debra Merritt: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, we hope that you've been encouraged by this three-day broadcast featuring Dr. Dobson and three moms who had the privilege and challenge of raising strong-willed children. As you've heard here on Family Talk, these moms went through some dark difficult days with their defiant kids. But in the end, it was all worth it. If you remember just one thing from these past three days, remember that there is hope. Keep going. Now, if you'd like to request your own CD copy of this broadcast or Dr. Dobson's book, *The New Strong-Willed Child*, just go to drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. That's drjamesdobson.org/broadcast, or you can also give us a call at 877-732-6825.

Remember, you can also contact us through the U.S. mail. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip code, 80949. Again, our ministry mailing address The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80949. Thanks so much for listening to Family Talk today. From all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, I'm Roger Marsh. Have a blessed day.

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