



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: When Suffering Becomes Strength and Undying Faith

Guest(s): Dr. Gary Oliver

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Paula: Hi, I'm Paula.

Tori: Hi, I'm Tori.

Dominick: Hi, I'm Dominic.

Mark: And I'm Mark.

Brian: And I'm Brian. From all of us here at the broadcast department at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we want to wish you a very Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. During this Christmas season, we often enjoy festive gatherings, worship services together and creating warm memories with family and friends. However, not all of us may experience the joy of the season and many of us may actually be going through hard times instead. Today's program will focus on how the power of prayer can carry you through what may seem to be insurmountable circumstances. Our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton, spoke with today's guest, Dr. Gary Oliver, as Gary shares his testimony about how he found comfort in the Word and strength and renewed faith when tossed into a sea of turmoil and suffering. Today's conversation was first aired this past October and is included in our 2022 Best of Broadcast Collection.

Now, before we dive in, I want to mention to you that this month we have a matching grant in place here at the ministry to help us with our end-of-year fundraising. This is because of the kindness and generosity of some very special friends of our ministry. So if you choose to make a donation this month, your dollars will go twice as far. That's right. Double your impact. Just think of how this program and this ministry can help others across the nation. We can only share our ministry and the good news with your help. To make a donation, please visit drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org or call us at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. We thank you for being a faithful listener and we thank you for your generosity and support.

And now let me tell you a little bit more about Gary Oliver. Gary survived eight cancer surgeries as well as removal of 80% of his tongue. Dr. Oliver also buried his father, his son, his only sibling and his wife all within the span of just four years. And through it all, he's held onto his lifeline of gut-wrenchingly honest prayer. There's so much to learn about this topic so let's listen in now to our own Dr. Tim Clinton with our very special guest, Dr. Gary Oliver.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, how many times have you heard the saying, be careful on what you say to others, how you treat them, because you never know what that someone is going through. Well, you're about to hear a conversation today from a man with influence in my life. It's because of his heart, his fight and God's work in his life. And we're praying here at Family Talk that God would use this story, speak words of hope, challenge and hopefully some comfort in your life. Gary, welcome into Family Talk. Dr. Dobson sends his regards. I know he has great love and affection for you.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Thank you, Tim.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We really appreciate you joining us.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Thank you so much. It's an honor to be here. I, of course, growing up, learned about Dr. Dobson, but as I became acquainted with him during Promise Keepers and his heart, his passion, his vision, which he still has. Character, integrity, a lot of love and affection, so thank you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Years ago, Dr. Dobson wrote a book that really ministered to a lot of people. Tough subject. It was called *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. And in that book, he just talked about how life can sometimes not just bring curve balls, life can just absolutely knock the wind out of you and take you to a place where it gets dark and you get confused, maybe even about who He is, whether or not He loves you, whether or not His heart is toward you. And people have a lot of reactions to that. Gary, I want people to get to know the side of you that I think God's probably done His greatest work in and it's a tough story.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: If you don't mind, take us back to when this tough journey started in your life.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Well, just a wee bit of context, I grew up in a Christian home. I went to Sunday school 12 years and didn't miss a Sunday. By the time I was a freshman, I'd memorized hundreds of Bible verses. I had a year of undergraduate Bible. I had three years for my M.Div, two more years of Th.M. So five years of graduate theology, years of Greek and Hebrew. I knew the Word and I loved it. And then as a psychologist, I began to become skilled at understanding how God wants to work with all of who we are, our minds, our hearts, our emotions. But in 2005, God began to trust me with a unique adventure. In 2005, I buried my dad. Two months later, my late wife, Carrie, then of 25 years, got metastatic pancreatic

cancer, was told she'd live maybe six months. 2006, I had my fifth cancer surgery, chemo, radiation, but I was used to it.

2007, my middle son Matt died, and two months later my wife of at that point 27 years, Carrie, died. 2008, I buried my only sibling, my sister, Marsha. So in four years, I finished burying my entire nuclear family and half of my current family. A year later I had my seventh cancer surgery. They removed 80% of my tongue, took muscle off my leg, put it in my mouth. They said I'd never speak again. I'd never be able to swallow or chew. I'd have a feeding tube the rest of my life. But I was alive. And then about nine months after that, I went back down to MD Anderson. The cancer had reoccurred. They said it was advanced, Stage 4. There was nothing they could do. I had less than three months to live, go home and call hospice. And that was the life of a person who had spent his life serving God, understanding the Word, unpacking truths, encouraging others, talking about how God is trustworthy and how He protects us and how we can count on Him. And so yeah, it was a dark seven years of the soul.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, some people would be thinking maybe what Job's friends said, what's going on? Why this valley? Why this darkness? There's no doubt, Gary, when you were going through all that, you began to question a lot of things.

Dr. Gary Oliver: One amazing thing, Tim, was that in the process, God helped me see that I needed to stop asking why. Because sometimes there may be 15, 20 reasons why. But God said, Gary, you need to ask, who am I. You need to ask, what have I promised. You need to ask, where might I be at work? And it's not that I didn't wonder why, but I have found that why often leads to a cul-de-sac. And we just go round and round and round.

Oh, there were times, Tim, I didn't know where God was. I felt betrayed. He says He protects us. I couldn't sure prove it. He said He would guard us. Well, I was not a good example. And yet somehow, I knew that He was a promise keeper. Sometimes He takes His jolly good time, that sometimes is several years. But somehow I knew at the deepest level more than I knew with my mind. I knew the verses, I knew the promises. But it was like, "Gary, I'll never leave you or forsake you. I can't because I promised. I have no choice. You are my beloved. I'm at work and you'll just have to trust me."

Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, in that journey, I want to go into the pain piece a little bit more because we've heard of the sayings, pain is a gift. By the way, it's a gift that nobody wants.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Reframing, developing perspective is hard because when you stand at the casket of a son, of a wife and you realize they're never coming back, humanly speaking, it's unspeakable grief.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And I know the question why needs to be reframed into a who. If you grew up in a Christian home and you have been no stranger to pain, you've walked down these roads, but at the same time you want to just like, you can't help but just keep screaming. God, why?

Dr. Gary Oliver: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Listen, I've tried to do these things right. I've tried to be faithful. You promised that you'd love us, but I don't sense or feel your presence. And Gary, I mean, people get stuck there because if God is a good God, then why are these things happening and He could intervene.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Yeah. He delights in using us and He wants to help us go deeper with Him. He wants to move us beyond head knowledge to heart knowledge. It's like when you get married and you court and you have this oxytocin and your fiancée's perfect and she seems very perfect but then after you're together for a while, the oxytocin wears off. And what you thought was funny was no longer funny. And you begin to see some things about yourself and each other. And you find, most young couples do, that you had buttons that your beautiful, amazing fiancée can push that you didn't know you had. And that's how maturation takes place. I think of the Psalms. Talk about a massive failure. I mean, David, come on. I mean, he has an affair with a married woman. He has her husband killed and this stuff. And then he came back and God says that he was a man after his own heart.

And this process taught me the depth of sin. Not theoretically, but the power of his shed blood. And time and time again, I sense God saying, "Gary, it's not how much you know. Keep on reading." I still memorize Scripture. I've read a lot of your books, Tim. But it's about doing. It's about being. Get out of the boat. And after a while you learn things don't have to change. You want them to change. I never stopped praying for that. But at some point you begin to learn that he is enough. And that's the deepest lesson that we can learn, that my joy is not dependent upon everything going great. I like it when it does. But I have a knowledge and awareness of God's power, His presence, His Spirit that my decades of study didn't give me. Though sometimes I still find myself asking, why me? It's like the only answer I hear is, "you'll find out."

Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, do you think God weeps with us?

Dr. Gary Oliver: Oh.

Dr. Tim Clinton: People often ask me, do you think God sees what's happening inside my heart and is He tender toward that?

Dr. Gary Oliver: Tim, absolutely. If we are in Him and He is in us, He can't not experience what we do. Maybe in a different way. He is God. But Jesus wept. And the Bible says He keeps track of all of our tears. That means that we have a God who knows us better than we do and that happens because of sin. And that's why He came. God sent His son. He understands the depth and breadth of the fall of sin better than we ever will this side of Heaven. And quite frankly, after what I've gone through, I understand God's love, His mercy, His goodness, His grace, His faithfulness. And that may sound weird to some of our listeners, but I've been through a lot more stuff than most people ever go through.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When I think of the life of Job. Gary, you often tell the story of after your surgery, your tongue surgery, the cancer, that you would stand in front of the mirror and try to say your ABCs and wind up crying your eyes out. I want to make sure people are with us here because yeah, you have a lesson, you have a gift for us. That and for us to be able to get there, we got to go there.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Yeah. I spent hundreds of hours, Tim, that's not hyperbole, trying to say my ABCs. And early on I would start crying and I would say, God, what the fat's going on? Okay? Your promises. I can't say my picking ABCs. I'm supposed to never talk again. Okay. How can you use some ... I mean, I'm writing books, I'm traveling, speaking, internet, blah, blah, blah. And now I can't even say my ABCs. Where are you? Oh, I quoted the Bible back to Him many times. And somehow in the midst of that, Tim, I knew in a way that transcends putting into words. In fact, several times I heard him say, "Gary, nothing of any significance has changed." And I had some talks with Him about that. What He was saying was, "Gary, I still love you. You're still my son. All my promises are true. Okay? Your eternal [inaudible 00:14:24] is with me and I'm at work in your life and I will bless you." But sometimes He takes his time, Tim.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When did the mental shift change, Gary, for you? I go back. We've been friends for a long time.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Oh yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And when I think of you, it's like I don't want to think about what you've been through because humanly speaking, it scares all of us. We would rather ignore or deny it. You hear what I'm saying?

Dr. Gary Oliver: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And no doubt, Gary, you've had some of Job's friends in your life.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Oh my.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But when did the mental shift happen? I know it shifted.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Oh yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And I want our listeners to know that what He's saying is true. Gary really believes this about God.

Dr. Gary Oliver: It didn't happen overnight, but it kind of began ... I was in ICU. I'd been on a ventilator for several days. I woke up. I had tubes everywhere. They had to put new holes to put more tubes. The doctor comes in and gives me the diagnosis, you'll never speak again, blah, blah, blah, blah. And after he leaves, I begin to talk with God. What's happening? What's going on? Where are you? And so, I heard Him say, "Gary, I haven't gone anywhere." And that's the first time I heard that, "nothing of any significance has changed. You are my son, you are my beloved, you are precious in my sight. What you have right now, my son, you can handle with my help." I didn't feel it. Okay? I thought He'd gotten the wrong guy. But it took, well, a good year before I began to really understand and be able to trust that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Gary, coming back, some people would say, listen, so are we to just accept what happens to us? What about praying and crying out to God and asking Him for healing?

Dr. Gary Oliver: Oh yeah. Oh my. I had friends. I had all kinds of prayer things. Listen, isn't the majority of the Psalms David complaining?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Oh yeah.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Talking to God. I mean, He was not a happy camper. Oh no. We have to be open and honest. And sometimes I probably used words with God I wouldn't use in public, but I had nothing to hide. I felt like I hid nothing to Him. But the way we learned to be faithful is the only way is by being faithful. The only way we can learn how to do it is to do it. And that means we're going to slip and fall, make mistakes, and that means He'll be there. And my sense is God would rather see me get out of the boat and sink in the water than sit in the boat the whole time because I don't feel like I can trust Him.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When I was a boy, I remember my mother had a lot of spunk in her, Gary, but one of her sayings was, how long are you going to sleep in that bed? Get up and get moving.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Wow.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You can't drown in your sorrows.

Dr. Gary Oliver: No.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And that was really her message. Don't get lost in that.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Get up.

Dr. Gary Oliver: See, I have more joy, Tim, than I have ever known. I know more about joy than I've ever known. At one point I looked at every Hebrew, Greek, whatever, time the word joy was used. So I knew about joy. I had a great message on joy. But now I know it in ways that transcend words and sovereign joy. We use joy and happy as synonyms. In God's economy, they're not. Happy depends on if good things happen to happen to me, I'm happy. If bad things happen to happen, I can't be happy. God's joy is independence of what happens. And you know what I'm talking about, don't you?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah.

Dr. Gary Oliver: But it takes time. The refiner's fire. But the product, this sounds like I'm trying to be clever. I'm not. The product is always worth the process. Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your face and glorify your Father who is in Heaven." You be faithful because I'm going to use that to encourage others.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That process, Gary, is a challenge. And I guess at the heart of it, you have to really be rooted in the mindset that God is good ultimately. Hell would have you believe that He is not good, that He doesn't really care about you, that He doesn't know your name. Gary, as you have journeyed, you've spoken a lot and I know you take time and you challenge people to just know what it means to experience God. Why such a fervent push in that direction? A lot of people want action plans. They want strategies. Well, that can be helpful. There's another level.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Yup. As I began to go back and look at the early church fathers and mothers, I found time and time again that they spent time with Him, not just with their shopping lists. Their prayer wasn't, give me, I need, thank you. But they spent time in the Old Testament and knew, be still, wait, listen, meditate again, again. Christ does His miracles and rather than get the people to start a bunch of small churches, He was up in the mountains by Himself. That is not the way to have church growth. But even God the Son needs a time with the Father. And I begin to see those, what some call holy habits, sacred rhythms. In some ways, those were the key to going beyond head knowledge to heart knowledge.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The letting go part is the hardest part.

Dr. Gary Oliver: And you don't do just once, do you?

Dr. Tim Clinton: No. And that lost piece is such a companion of life. And there are many people right now who are listening and they're in a dark season and for them, it's very difficult to listen. But they want to listen and they have to listen because they know they have to journey.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: They've got to go somewhere.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: They want to hear you say, God is still good.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And one day He'll wipe every tear from their eyes.

Dr. Gary Oliver: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: One day.

Dr. Gary Oliver: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Everything will change. One day, Gary, you get to put your arms around that gang of yours you love. That's what keeps you going, isn't it?

Dr. Gary Oliver: Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But until then, God's got you here.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Yep.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Maybe just to do a radio broadcast, and Gary, I'm going to give you the close here and I want you to speak straight into the lives of people and I want you to pray over them and give them something that God gave you.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Success is ultimately you and I, us, choosing to be faithful, to believe in Him. Sometimes that involves feeling better. Sometimes it involves enormous victory. Sometimes it involves pain that doesn't make sense. But again, and again as I look unto Him, the author and professor of my faith, as I don't just read about Him, but as I spend more time with Him, there comes an intimacy, an intimacy that again transcends words and the peace that does pass all understanding. It's a process that takes time. The more I avoid pain, the longer the pain's going to go, the worse it's going to get. Some ways, the easy way out is to trust Him, to come back a thousand times. God, I believe. Help my unbelief.

God, thank you for those who are with us today. Lord, some have tears right now. Some have heartaches they can't put into words. Some wonder if and where you are. Lord, I pray you've used Tim's and my sharing to maybe give them a greater perspective, to maybe see you, be aware of your promises in some new ways. God remind them right now that you're present, that you love

them and you can't not be faithful. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The old Puritans used to say it this way. They called it the valley of vision can see different now. Gary, as we close this piece up, I'm reminded of the words of Job when he said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." I guess that's been the heart of our conversation. That's a difficult place to go, but it's everything.

Dr. Gary Oliver: Amen.

Roger Marsh: Dr. Gary Oliver truly has an inspiring testimonial to share. I'm Roger Marsh and this is Family Talk. I take comfort in these words from Jesus in the gospel of John chapter 16, verse 33, when he said, "I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world." I hope that you too have been comforted by today's message. If so, you might also enjoy owning the 2022 Best of Broadcast collection. It's filled with inspirational stories and biblical guidance. For a suggested donation of \$50, you can have your own copy and we will mail it directly to you with free shipping. If you'd like your copy even faster, we also have a digital download version available that's new this year. You can access it right now. Just go to drjamesdobson.org/bestof2022. That's drjamesdobson.org/bestof2022.

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