



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Taking My Life Back – Part 1

Guest(s): Rebekah Gregory

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome, everyone, to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Hello, everyone. This is James Dobson, and you're listening to Family Talk, a division of James Dobson Family Institute. And I want to start today's program with a declarative statement. You may have noticed that life is not fair, and it can be very difficult. If you believe that it's supposed to be problem free and you've gone through some very hard knocks with your life, you're likely to feel victimized and demoralized by society or even by God. It's a horrible feeling that can paralyze a person in their circumstances.

And we're talking to some people today who are there, some who have been through really difficult times, and they're clinically depressed and confused with life and angry at others who they perceive as being luckier than they. And they might blame God for their circumstances. I want to offer some hope to them and to all of us because life is difficult, and it is not perfect, and it was never intended to be. And if you think it is, look at some of the heroes in the Bible. They've gone through some very, very difficult things too, starting with Job. But I want you to meet a woman whom I met an hour ago. She is a delightful person, and she's had her share of difficulties, and the way she's dealt with it has been an inspiration to others. She's Rebekah Gregory, and she has written a book called *Taking My Life Back: The Story of My Faith, Determination, and Surviving the Boston Marathon Bombing*. That'll tell you where we're going today. Rebekah, I'm so glad to have you here.

Rebekah Gregory: It is an absolute honor, Dr. Dobson, to be here.

Dr. James Dobson: You know what I'm talking about, don't you?

Rebekah Gregory: I do.

Dr. James Dobson: About tough times?

Rebekah Gregory: Yes. I've had some tough times, I would say.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's start by talking about the most difficult one. Take us back to April 15th, 2013, your birthday, as a matter of fact, wasn't it?

Rebekah Gregory: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: When you were attending the Boston Marathon and you were near the finish line, and tell us what happened. We remember it from the headlines and the news and on television, but you experienced it. Tell us about it.

Rebekah Gregory: It was a great weekend actually. It was my first time ever in the city of Boston, my 26th birthday weekend. I had gone up there to watch someone, a friend of ours, run. And oftentimes, I joke that... People think I was automatically running in the Boston Marathon, and I'm like, "No, no. I was on the sidelines eating chocolate-covered pretzels, wondering why anyone runs 26.2 miles." But I had also taken my son up with me, and he was five at the time, Noah. And we caught a Red Sox game, we toured the city, and we were all packed up ready to go back home to Texas as soon as that marathon concluded on Monday. And we started out the day at the 17-mile marker. We were tracking our runner with an app on our phones. So we're there holding up our signs, and everybody's excited.

Dr. James Dobson: So you weren't stable. You were moving.

Rebekah Gregory: We were moving. We were wanting to see her actually finish the race, and so we were trying to keep up with her. And then what people don't tell you is that when you're watching someone else run a marathon, then you end up running the marathon with them to try to cheer them on.

Dr. James Dobson: To keep up with them.

Rebekah Gregory: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, yeah. And you were doing that?

Rebekah Gregory: We were doing that. And I was also trying to keep my five-year-old son occupied, because then I started to question why in the world did I bring a kindergartner to a race of half a million people.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, tell us what happened.

Rebekah Gregory: Well, so we started at the 17-mile marker, and then one of our people in our group of about nine said, "Hey, why don't we go down to the finish line and actually be able to see our runner cross?" So everyone thought it was a great idea, and we started making our way through the crowds and trying to push our way through the people. And during this time, Noah, my son, was getting really, really bored, and he starts tugging on my clothes and asking when we're going

to leave. And I remember getting to our spot right there at the finish, and it was a great spot. We were right in the middle of the action.

Dr. James Dobson: How'd you find it? I mean, everybody wants to be at the finish line.

Rebekah Gregory: We pushed our way through. We got there. We were determined, and we were there. We could see everybody cross, and they just had these huge smiles on their faces. That's a big goal, to run the Boston Marathon. And it was really cool to see that. But Noah just kept getting more and more bored, and he said, "Mom, come on. Do you have any toys for me to play with? I'm so bored," and tugging on my clothes. And I said, "Noah, buddy, why don't you sit down on my feet and play in the rocks like you're a scientist." And there were no rocks. We were on asphalt. But to a five-year-old, that was cool. And so Noah sat down on my feet with his back against my shins, and that's exactly where he was when a bomb in a backpack went off three feet behind us.

Dr. James Dobson: Three feet?

Rebekah Gregory: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And 260 were injured.

Rebekah Gregory: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: What an incredible moment. How about yourself?

Rebekah Gregory: It was unlike anything I've ever experienced, obviously, and something that I wouldn't wish upon my worst enemy. The hardest part of that day was not the physical, though. It was the emotional. It was everything that not only I saw, but my son saw as well.

Dr. James Dobson: Everybody was screaming?

Rebekah Gregory: Everyone was screaming. I could not move anything but my head. My bones were laying next to me on the sidewalk. My left leg was on fire. There were people's body parts all around us that weren't even attached to them. There were nails, BBs, ball bearings, everything that these brothers packed under these pressure-cooker bombs. And it was a true war scene.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. They had run. One of them that was responsible for the final stage of the bomb ran, didn't he?

Rebekah Gregory: He wanted to get a second bomb placed down.

Dr. James Dobson: A second bomb?

Rebekah Gregory: Yes. So there was one that... We were at the first one. And then a couple-hundred feet away from us was another backpack with a bomb in it.

Dr. James Dobson: What happened? Explain what took place then. Paramedics came from everywhere.

Rebekah Gregory: It was chaos. I mean, it was true chaos, and it did feel like we were in the war. I mean, the things that we saw are what you see when soldiers are overseas. It was just the scariest moments of my life, and it was honestly the day that I thought that I was for sure going to die.

Dr. James Dobson: You were terribly injured, though.

Rebekah Gregory: I was. And a guy, I remember, he tied a tourniquet around my leg, and some others lifted me onto a gurney, and I said a prayer. I said, "God, if this is it, take me. But let me know that my son is okay." And right after that, I saw in my peripheral vision Noah being picked up by a police officer, and I could see that his leg was bleeding, but he was nowhere near as injured as I was. And then I thought I really was going to die because God just gave me confirmation that Noah's okay, so now it's my turn. But it was really a way of allowing me to say, "Okay, now I need to take care of myself."

And when I look back on that day, as horrible as it was, what I see are the first responders and the innocent bystanders that rushed in to save our lives, not knowing if a third or a fourth or a fifth bomb was getting ready to go off. And I see the people that were brave enough to put us on those gurneys and transfer us to the ambulance and a hospital, and those are the reasons that I'm here. And-

Dr. James Dobson: These were not paramedics? These were bystanders?

Rebekah Gregory: These were people that were just coming to help, people that had just crossed the finish line or were standing at the tents. I mean, everyone rushed in to help save us.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you see the people dying? Were they close enough to you?

Rebekah Gregory: I saw everything, and there's so many images that will be burned into my head forever of that day. But I saw angels too, and that's what I take away from it. With as horrible as that scene was, I see the angels that rushed in to help us. And then the bombing happened right after a drill the year before. So if it was in another city, they would not have been as equipped and prepared to handle it. And everyone that got off the street all made it to a hospital, and all are alive today because all of the major trauma hospitals were within a half-mile radius of when it happened.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, my. Well, one of the victims who died was a little boy, wasn't it?

Rebekah Gregory: Mm-hmm. He was.

Dr. James Dobson: As I recall.

Rebekah Gregory: Yes. There was two ladies and then a police officer that died in the shootout and then another police officer that died as a result of his injuries too.

Dr. James Dobson: Rebekah, were you panicked? You said you thought you were going to die. Describe your reaction.

Rebekah Gregory: I was panicked because I didn't know what had happened, and that was the scariest part. I knew that it was something terrible, but looking at myself and just being able to see the scenes that I saw: my bones laying next to me, my leg on fire, I was bleeding out at a very rapid pace. But at that moment, my mom instincts kicked in, and I just wanted my son to be okay. And I remember the long ambulance ride to the hospital. It felt like forever. And I remember being in the most excruciating pain in my entire life and just begging them to put me to sleep or give me medicine to help knock this out. I just wanted it to go away. And I got to the hospital, and that's when they placed me in a medically induced coma.

But the amazing part is, is that Noah and I actually got separated. We went to two separate hospitals. But my medically induced coma was for a couple of days, and about the fifth day, I was really waking up and coherent enough to know what was going on. And it was the same day that Noah was coming to visit me in my hospital. So I felt like that was God's way of saying, "Okay, rest. I've got this, and we're going to give you some rest."

Dr. James Dobson: When the bombing occurred, did Noah see it? And then you were separated. Was that terribly traumatic for him?

Rebekah Gregory: It was so traumatic for him. Noah could remember everything, at one point, from that day. So he would ask about specific people and specific clothing, and you would look back at the first scene of the bomb, and sure enough, these people that he's describing are right there. He lost his innocence that day. I thought he was never going to be okay again. And I spent 56 days in the hospital initially, and the first thing that he said to me when I got home, when I was wheeled in a wheelchair to my mom's house because I could no longer even go to our own house, my little boy came out, and he said, "Don't worry, Mom. We are never leaving this house again." And it was on the way home from the hospital that my own trauma and PTSD set in, because I had been confined to this one room for 56 days with the same nurses and same doctors taking care of me. And then all of a sudden, I felt like every single person was out to get me in all of this trouble, and I was going to die before I got home.

Dr. James Dobson: How was your PTSD manifested?

Rebekah Gregory: It just manifested in the way that as soon as I left the comfort of that hospital, it was like every noise, every car, every person that we saw... And even in the house, in my mom's house, the familiar sounds of her dog barking and my little sister and Noah even playing in the room, it was enough to terrify me. And I remember-

Dr. James Dobson: Did you have flashbacks to the bombing?

Rebekah Gregory: Flashbacks, nightmares, loud noises. There was a time-

Dr. James Dobson: What an unbelievably evil thing to do to innocent people.

Rebekah Gregory: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Just people standing there enjoying the marathon, and to do that and with children all around... One of the men who did that is now dead, right?

Rebekah Gregory: Mm-hmm.

Dr. James Dobson: And the other one is... What's he doing? He's obviously in prison, but...

Rebekah Gregory: He is, and he got the death penalty. I actually had to go back and testify in the trial of the remaining bomber, and that was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do.

Dr. James Dobson: There's a big debate over the death penalty, and there are people out there who say that this is not a Christian response. Boy, when I see something like this, justice just calls out for it.

Rebekah Gregory: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, that young man should not live. He should be executed. And he has a death sentence hanging over him, but it may not be for 20 years or longer.

Rebekah Gregory: I'm with you because I feel like we have free will, and when you do something that terrible, I mean, there's consequences to those actions. And I remember sitting in court, and he had absolutely no remorse on his face. He was leaning back in his chair, fiddling with his pencil, cracking jokes with his attorney. And I went back, and I gave a victim impact statement. And the whole time I stared at him, I felt like I was staring at the face of the devil because his eyes were just black. You couldn't see his soul. And when you talk to people, you feel their heart, and you feel their compassion. And there was none of that. There was no remorse. There was no "I'm sorry" for anything that he's done.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you feel anger toward him?

Rebekah Gregory: I didn't feel angry until I went to the trial and I saw the lack of remorse, and then I saw the families of the victims that had to come in and rehash these terrible moments of their lives, and that was hard. It was hard. And people ask me about forgiveness, and as a Christian, we're supposed to forgive. And I think that forgiveness is a process, and I think that I'm closer now than I was six years ago, but that man almost took my son from me. He did take my leg from me, and he changed the entire course of my life. But if I was to give in to that anger and if I held that in my heart, then that would only mean that I couldn't move forward. So I try not to hold onto that resentment, and I try to do everything that I did before and even more because I have a new appreciation for life now.

Dr. James Dobson: I may have a different take on an angry response to something like that. I'm not sure that the Scriptures support those who say, having gone through that, you can get to the point where you don't feel upset or anger toward people. I don't think that is right. You can control what you do with the way you feel, but feelings are neither right or wrong. They just are.

Rebekah Gregory: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: You can't help what you feel, but you can forgive and sometimes not forget.

Rebekah Gregory: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: You have not forgotten, have you?

Rebekah Gregory: I haven't.

Dr. James Dobson: I think it's unreasonable for people to say, "You should be able to get so far beyond that." You don't feel what you went through or what these men have done to you.

Rebekah Gregory: It's still with me every day. Every day I wake up, and I either reach for a wheelchair or I reach for a prosthetic leg as a result of what happened that day. I still have hundreds of pieces of metal and shrapnel in my body that I'm still continuing to go through surgeries for.

Dr. James Dobson: And they tried to save your leg for a while, didn't they?

Rebekah Gregory: They did. For a year and a half, I went through constant surgeries and tried to do limb salvage. And I'm really appreciative of that time just because when you can do nothing and you're so broken, I feel like that's when God really just comes into your life and makes you whole and gives you peace, as weird as that may sound. Like, for me, I went from a night where I wanted to die. I just called out to the Lord, and I said, "Why in the world did you spare me?"

Dr. James Dobson: How far into the process were you?

Rebekah Gregory: It was a couple days after I came home from the hospital, that initial stay. The PTSD had set in. The trauma had set in, and I was just like, "Why? Why am I spared from this? What could I possibly have, or what could you possibly have in store for me? What is the purpose?" And right around that time was when my son, Noah, came running into the room and just cuddled up with me on the bed that I was laying on. And he said, "You know what, Mom? We're good, right? We're going to get through this." And I'm like, "Okay, Lord."

Dr. James Dobson: What a gift!

Rebekah Gregory: "Okay, Lord, yes." And he's done that for me so many different times in the last six years. Whenever I start to doubt myself, whenever I start to feel sorry for something, I look at my little boy, and I'm like, "I have nothing to feel sorry for." If I had to lose my leg and still have surgeries ongoing for the rest of my life, if it meant saving him, just being that shield... Even though I know I didn't do it. God is obviously the one in charge of that. But I would do it tomorrow and the next day and the next day.

Dr. James Dobson: What led you to write this book? It's called *Taking My Life Back*. What a great title. And the subtitle I like also: *My Story of Faith, Determination, and Surviving the Boston Marathon Bombing*. There's a resiliency in that title. Is it really true? Have you taken your life back?

Rebekah Gregory: I feel like I take my life back every single day I decide to not give up and continue to pick up the pieces and continue to know that God is in control of it all. The majority of people, I'd say, are not going to get blown up by a bomb at a marathon, but every single person has life blow up in their face. And my life has been a series of different traumas.

Dr. James Dobson: That is so good. I'd like you to say it again.

Rebekah Gregory: Sure. The majority of people will never get blown up by a bomb at a marathon, but every single person has life blow up in their face. And I've had traumas ever since I can remember. It started out with an abusive dad, who was supposed to be an evangelist and traveled all over the world preaching God's love and came home and beat me and my mom. And then it continued on through my teen years. I got into a really terrible car accident that should have taken my life. Six months before Boston, I actually got held up in a Walmart parking lot and robbed at gunpoint.

So for me, writing this book meant being vulnerable and exposing the toughest parts of my life so that maybe someone else that's going through their own stuff can resonate, and maybe they can get through something and cling to God like I did. Because there's been so many times in my life where I go my own way, and I'm on my own path. For instance, I had a baby at 20 years old. But when I decided that I was going to give it all to God, everything, and not go my own way anymore, it was just my life transformed.

Dr. James Dobson: And so He has been there for you through the tough times?

Rebekah Gregory: He's always there. I think it's really easy to look back on... Right before I left for Boston, I was swamped at work. I had a quota to meet. I almost canceled my trip at least five times. I pulled out my phone that night when I was still sitting at work at 10:30 and I was getting ready to leave the next morning at 6:00 AM, and I pulled out my phone, and I almost canceled. So that's hard not to think about. What would my life look like had I not gone on that trip, had I not been at the Boston Marathon.

But everything that's happened since, I look at it, and I've reconnected with my amazing husband. I had my beautiful daughter, as scary as her birth was too. We've created a foundation for children and families that have gone through their own trauma, based on those days where we were so scared we didn't know what to do, that I was just frantically Googling how to help my son, how to help me, what therapies we needed. And through that research and that constant just wanting to know more, we realized the need for childhood trauma advocacy and the need to be a solution. And I feel like God has led us up to this point.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, one thing is sure, you wouldn't be sitting here right now if this hadn't happened.

Rebekah Gregory: That's for sure.

Dr. James Dobson: And you have an opportunity to talk to many people who need to hear what you have to say. Your title of your book here says you're not going to give up on life, that the Lord is in control and you're going on with your life.

Rebekah Gregory: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: I like that. That needs to be said.

Rebekah Gregory: Well, for 26 years, I expected to get out of bed and put two feet on the ground. And when I couldn't do that anymore, when I could no longer put two feet on the ground, my entire life changed. And not just physically, but emotionally. And it really made me appreciate just being able to get out of the bed at all, and my kids, being able to love on them and my husband. I mean, life is beautiful, but we have to decide that we're going to count our blessings and not count our problems.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that's a very courageous statement in itself, and I want to talk to you another day because this isn't the only trauma you've gone through. You had a really tough childhood.

Rebekah Gregory: I did.

Dr. James Dobson: So really, what I keep coming back to is the fact that there are people who can say, "Man, this is not right. This is not fair," and give up on life. And you haven't done that, despite the fact that you've really been kicked around a lot by life and by circumstances. And you've got something to say to those who are right there now. And the title of your book is *Taking My Life Back: My Story of Faith and Determination*. Do you still have a faith? You're still depending on the Lord?

Rebekah Gregory: My faith is stronger than ever, and I walk with the Lord. I try to walk with the Lord every single day because He directs my steps. He directs my path now.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you resent having to put on that prosthesis in the morning?

Rebekah Gregory: As much as I would love to just throw it across the room and never look at it again... I nicknamed my leg, by the way. Her name is Felicia. And I wrapped her up in a baby blanket when I first got my prosthetic, and she was like a new member of our family. I'm not resentful because it's a daily reminder of how short my life is. So every day, I am reminded that I almost lost my life for good. And my husband always gets kind of like, "Oh, Bec!" But I say, "If we're not laying on the pavement fighting for our life, then it's a good day." So if he's fussing at traffic or if he gets his feathers a little ruffled, I say, "Nope, babe, we're not on the pavement today." And he's like, "Bec, can you just let me have my moment please?"

Dr. James Dobson: Rebekah, how can people get in touch with you if they want you to come speak or participate in some way? How can they reach you?

Rebekah Gregory: They can reach me through my website at rebekahsangels.org.

Dr. James Dobson: Thank you for being with us today. We're talking to Rebekah Gregory, and I want to get back into your childhood because there's some things there we need to talk about as well. You're a strong woman. Thanks for being with us.

Rebekah Gregory: Thank you so much.

Roger Marsh: Wow, what a remarkable story of strength and resilience. This upcoming race in April marks the 10th anniversary of the Boston Marathon bombing, and it is truly amazing how far Rebekah Gregory has come since that tragedy. I'm Roger Marsh and hope you'll join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of Rebekah's compelling and inspiring testimony here on Family Talk. She'll tell us about what she overcame in her childhood and about her vision for Rebekah's Angels Foundation. If you'd like to share today's program with someone who would be encouraged by it, just visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

Despite the hardships of the aftermath from surviving such a horrific ordeal, Rebekah Gregory found strength in drawing closer to the Lord. If you have a neighbor who might be uplifted by developing a relationship with God, a great

introduction for them would be a life basket. Life baskets are a way to bless neighbors with a basket of treats and goodies that will introduce them to Jesus Christ and invite them to enjoy the loving Christian community at your local church this Easter. Life baskets are also a fun activity you can do with your family or friends as well. If you have any questions or if you'd like more information about Life Baskets, just give us a call at 877-732-6825 or visit lifebaskets.org. I'm Roger Marsh, and you've been listening to Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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