



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Finding True Forgiveness – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. R.T. Kendall

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. As Christmas draws closer, you might find yourself in the company of people who you don't really have the best relationship with. It might be a coworker, maybe one of your parents, perhaps even one of your grown children. In that case, it's important to remember how significant forgiveness is, even when you have to forgive someone who has hurt you very badly or maybe someone who hurt you and now is no longer with us, or perhaps someone with whom you no longer cross paths with. In Matthew 6:14-15, we read these words from Jesus, "For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their sins, your father will not forgive you your sins."

As we all know, forgiving someone who has hurt us can be extremely difficult, but Christ calls us to be prepared to forgive, especially when we don't want to. Today here on Family Talk, we're going to listen to a timeless interview featuring Dr. Dobson and his special guest, Dr. R.T. Kendall. Dr. Kendall is a highly respected theologian, speaker and author who has extensively studied the idea of forgiveness. He has previously pastored at Westminster Chapel in London, England for 25 years before retiring in 2002.

Today Dr. Kendall opens up about a difficult time he had forgiving someone who had profoundly hurt him. He will also share key lessons we can all learn about what forgiveness is from the biblical account of the life of Joseph. But before we begin, I want to remind you briefly about the matching grant that we have in place this month. Thanks to some very special friends of the ministry, you can make a tax-deductible donation to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute and every dollar you donate this month will be doubled. Learn more when you go online to drjamesdobson.org. And now let's join Dr. Dobson to further introduce our guest right here on this classic edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: R.T., it's very good to have you here.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: I'm honored to be here. This has got to be possibly the greatest honor of my life to be on this program.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I don't fully understand that, but thank you for saying it. You are a prolific writer. You have some very strong feelings about this book that we're going to talk about today, *Total Forgiveness*, don't you?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: I do. The concept changed my life. It was born in what was at the time, the greatest trial of my life.

Dr. James Dobson: You describe in the book what that trial was.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, I don't-

Dr. James Dobson: You don't go into the greatest detail.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: I can't name people, I don't want anybody to be able to trace it to anybody or anything like that, but an old friend by the name of Joseph Zone from Romania was in London. Because he was from outside London and wouldn't tell anybody, I decided to pour my heart out to him and I wasn't prepared for what he said. He looked at me and said, "R.T., you must totally forgive them. Until you totally forgive them, you will be in chains. Release them and you will be released." Nobody had ever talked to me like that in my life.

Dr. James Dobson: And yet you have a doctorate in theology and your life has been the Scripture. Yet you said in that book that the concept or the teaching in the Bible about forgiveness is one of the most fundamental truths in the Word.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: And yet it seems to have been swept under the carpet by the church for 2,000 years. Until just recently you couldn't find a book on forgiveness. You can find a book on God forgiving us, but not the A, B, C teaching of Jesus forgiving one another. I was amazed to find this out.

Dr. James Dobson: I wish we had time to share those scriptures because there are 18 or 20 that just jump out at you, and I don't understand why ministers haven't focused on that considering the fact that most of the people sitting out in front of them are angry at someone over something that they haven't forgiven.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, non-Christians are discovering the advantage of this, and the first person to benefit from total forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving. You are set free. You are released.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you have made this study of what the Bible has to say about this subject. You don't feel that it is an option.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Oh, there's no choice. There's no choice. Jesus said, "If you forgive not men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will not forgive you your trespasses." And it's

the chief way we grieve the Holy Spirit. And if we knew what happens when we hold a grudge, we are hurting ourselves. We lose presence of mind, presence of God, sense of His leadership, the anointing in our lives, we are impoverished to the degree we don't forgive.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, it's very easy to tell someone they ought to forgive. It is sometimes very hard to do it because the person who hurt us was frequently wrong in doing that. It's not that you misperceived it. People do things to us that were of a bad motive or intentional in whatever aspect it was, and yet you have to forgive anyway. Let's go back to the personal illustration you sort of gave. How did you go about forgiving, when everything inside of you said this was not right?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Okay. You don't go to the people and say, "I forgive you." Because once we do that, it's an unconscious desire to hurt them a little bit because we want them to know they've hurt us, so we go to them and say, "I forgive you for what you've done." Nine out of 10 people we ever have to forgive, you could put them under a lie detector, they don't even think they've done anything. So you don't go to them and say, "I forgive you." It's got to happen in your heart, and if it happens in the heart, it shows and they can feel it. And the people I had to forgive, I never went to them, but they could tell, and we actually became friends. We just never talked about it.

Dr. James Dobson: It is freeing, isn't it?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Oh, it sets you free. It sets you free,

Dr. James Dobson: And I can tell you as a psychologist, and you know this as a minister, that as long as you are angry and as long as you have not forgiven, it's a cancer of the soul that rots you from within and it doesn't hurt the other person that you're angry at, it destroys you.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: We somehow think that if we don't forgive them, that we're going to get at them some way and God says, "Vengeance is mine. I will recompense." But the one who won't forgive, he's the one that's likely to develop high blood pressure, kidney disease, arthritis. That doesn't mean that everyone who has these ailments that that's the reason, but it is often there is a link between the two, your physical condition and not forgiving.

Dr. James Dobson: I mentioned the field of psychology a minute ago. There are fads that come and go. And 10, 15 years ago, one of the fads in pop psych was that you had to get rid of this anger. And so the way they went about doing this is to get you to say the meanest, harshest things you could say or think about the other person. There were what's called encounter bats, the most stupid things ever come along which were kind of foamy things and you beat up on each other as though that's going to get rid of the anger. It didn't work because it was not according to God's design.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, the reason I said to my friend, "Here's what they did." I was hoping he would say, "Well get it out of your system. You ought to be angry." I wasn't prepared. He said, "You must totally forgive them." It was the greatest word anybody ever said to me. I've never been the same since.

Dr. James Dobson: When you try to express it and to ventilate it, you want to make it worse.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, it's like reading pornography. You think that's going to satisfy you, you want more. And the person who wants to get it out of their system, they'll get more angry. There's no way that you're going to get rid of this until you totally forgive.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, R.T., we're talking to people who are listening to us who have good reason to be angry. Some of them were sexually abused as children, now they're adults and they can't forgive that uncle or that grandfather or that neighbor, maybe that stepfather. They can't forgive them because what they did is terrible and it is still alive as much as if it happened yesterday. Many have been rejected by a spouse, and that individual has run off with another lover and left them penniless and left them hurt and wounded. There's some horrible situations that you know that we're talking about indirectly today. What do you say to them? How do they begin if they don't tell the other person that they forgive them? How do they deal with these feelings that are anxiety?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, in my book *Total Forgiveness*, I give seven steps how to forgive. Many people think they have forgiven, but there are objective tests.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, what are they?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: The first you don't tell anybody what they did. That's rule number one. You tell nobody what they did. Why do we tell? We tell to hurt the person we tell to make ourselves look better. We tell so that the people that hurt us will lose credibility, and our way of punishing them and getting even is to hurt their reputation and that won't do. The first step is controlling the tongue, telling nobody. The only exception would be for therapeutic reasons. Tell one other person, tell your pastor, tell a counselor. That is fine, but if you're doing it to hurt somebody, smear them, blacken their reputation, that will only cause you to be more bitter and it doesn't work. The other exception would be if in a court of law you need to testify. I had a lady in Westminster Chapel who was raped and they found the rapist and he was from a Middle Eastern country and she said, "If they send him back, he will be beheaded, and I have forgiven him. What do I do?"

I said, "You must testify. He's a danger to society." But it wasn't a personal grudge. But the first thing is you don't tell what they did. The second thing is, Jim, you won't let them be afraid of you. Never let them feel intimidated by you. You see, God isn't that way. He forgives us. He's not given us a spirit of fear but of love, of power, of sound mind. And this is why the Holy Spirit enables us to

cry, Abba, Father and God doesn't want us to be afraid of Him, and when we make a person afraid of us, we're not being like Jesus. Jesus puts people at ease. A person walks into a room and you see someone and they freeze and you say, "Good." That shows there's a grudge there, unfinished business. The third step, you won't let them feel guilty.

You see Joseph, when he forgave his brothers, he actually said, "Don't be angry with yourselves." But we punish people by sending them on a guilt trip. And this brings up a very important point. A lot of people say you don't have to forgive them until they're sorry, but that's the big cop out because chances are you will never have to forgive them because most people don't even think they've done anything. If you go by the old covenant, yes, it's tit-for-tat like in the Middle East today, tit-for-tat suicide bombing, then revengeance and then revengeance for that. But Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." There was not a hint of revengeance at the cross. It takes a little bit of grace to forgive them if they're sorry, minimal grace, but it takes a lot of grace to forgive them if they're not sorry. And total forgiveness is when you won't let them feel guilty.

Dr. James Dobson: The things you're sharing here go counter to every natural impulse.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: In the human personality.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: I've had people say to me, "I have never seen a miracle. I've never seen a person healed from cancer or a blind person healed." I say to them, "Total forgiveness is a miracle that will eclipse anything you've ever heard of because this is right against nature, but the one who does it, the reward is incalculable and the peace and the joy."

I might tell you that many years ago I had a spiritual experience with the Lord. When I was pastor of a church in Tennessee driving in my car one day, I had what I can only call a Damascus road experience. The glory of the Lord filled the car. I was given such a peace I didn't know it was possible in this life. Now, my reason for mentioning it is within a year I'd lost that. I tried every way to get it back. I started praying more and it didn't mean no harm. I started tithing. That didn't mean no harm. I thought of any way to get it. Do you know when I went through this crisis and I forgave those people, that joy came back and I had forgotten what it was like. I can tell you right now, it is no small thing to do. It's like climbing Mount Everest. Few people do it, but the reward is wonderful.

Dr. James Dobson: Number four.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Step number four, you let them save face. You know what Joseph said to his brothers? They had betrayed him 22 years before. Sold him to the Ishmaelites. He said to them, "It wasn't you who did it. God did it."

Dr. James Dobson: He intended it for good.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Yeah. God meant it for good. God meant it for good. They couldn't believe it. They couldn't believe what was happening.

Dr. James Dobson: He could have crushed them. He had the power to do it.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Do you know when he was a 17-year-old teenager, he had dreams and a dream was that those 11 brothers would bow to him? He always knew one day that dream would be fulfilled, but he thought that when it happened, he could say, gotcha. But instead it was a new Joseph. He was broken. He sobbed. He says, "Come close to me." He wouldn't let them be afraid of him. He didn't want them to feel guilty, and now he let them save face. It wasn't you who did it, God did it. And they were overwhelmed. Total forgiveness is when the person who hurt you doesn't even know it was a problem.

Dr. James Dobson: Boy, that is tough to deal with. Well, I am sure you, like me, have had occasions to lash out at somebody. The last thing I wanted to do was to forgive them to the degree that they didn't even know that I'd been hurt and not to hurt back.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Total forgiveness is you don't even let them feel guilty and don't even let them know it was a problem.

Dr. James Dobson: You base a lot of the book on that story of Joseph and his brothers.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: The basis for my objective text, Jim, is the story. Genesis 45, Joseph forgiving his brothers, it's all there.

Dr. James Dobson: Joseph was a type of Christ.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: He certainly was.

Dr. James Dobson: Which means that when you read of him, you think of Christ.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: And that's the way Jesus forgave us. Totally.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, number five.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Number five, you protect them from their darkest secret and greatest fear. Now, Joseph has said, "You didn't do it. God did it." Now these brothers are suddenly saying, "Ah, I know what's going to happen. He's going to make us go back to Canaan and tell our father, Jacob, what we did." Jim, they'd rather die. They'd rather die than have to do that. Joseph knew that and it's so beautiful. Read it in Genesis 45, he writes the script for them. He tells them what to say. He won't let them tell what those brothers did. He won't let them tell their father and he assures them that what they did, the father will never know. And

most of us have some information about another person we could hurt them with it.

Dr. James Dobson: Tell me what the script was.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: The script was, he says, "You go back to Canaan and here's what you say to my father, Joseph is now prime minister of Egypt." Or words to that effect. Hurry, don't delay, come and live in the land of Goshen and there I will look after you and take care of you. Come at once. End of story. That's all they were allowed to say. They could never tell their father and they didn't want to, and he wouldn't let them.

Dr. James Dobson: And what a story Joseph could have made them tell of how they sold him into slavery, they killed an animal and soaked his coat in blood and told him that Joseph was dead. I mean, what a horrible plot. And they could not even tell him.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, that's the way Jesus is with us. He covers for us, and that's what the blood of Jesus does. It washes away all sin, and God is not keen to yank that skeleton out of the closet. God totally forgives.

Dr. James Dobson: Number six.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Number six, it's a life sentence. What I mean by that is you have to keep doing it. Husband says to the wife, "I thought you forgave me." She says, "Well, that was yesterday." What happened was 17 years later, old Jacob died and now the brothers are so afraid this time Joseph is going to go for them. And they make up a story and they say, "Look, before our father died, he told us to tell you please forgive us for what we did." He says, "I can't believe I'm hearing this. Look here. I told you 17 years ago, I forgave you. I forgave you then, I forgive you now." It's in Genesis chapter 50, which shows he still did it. It's something you have to do, and this is the genius of Joseph and the reason God could trust him with such a lofty position. He totally forgave those brothers and he didn't do it just once and get them there in Egypt and now he goes for them.

No, it was something he did. And I say to anybody, you will have to keep doing this as long as you live because after you do it once, a week or two later, you say to yourself, "These people are going to get off the hook. They're not going to get caught." And you get all upset. I remember that in the situation where I had to forgive, after a few weeks, it dawned on me how they had done what they did and they're not going to get caught and I'd get so upset and I'd lose that peace and then I'd forgive them again and I got the peace back, and then I'd remember they're not going to get caught, I'd lose the peace. And I had it back and forth and I came to a decision that peace is better.

Dr. James Dobson: Paul said that love keeps no record of wrongs.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: That's a key verse. Oh, that's so hard. Why do we keep records?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Oh, so we can prove this. Husband says to the wife, "I will remember that." And he keeps his word. Do you know this teaching would heal any marriage by sundown, by sundown if both will stop pointing the finger. It's a choice. Total forgiveness is a choice. And by the way, don't be surprised if the people you have to forgive are those that you're closest to. Sometimes it's the Christian, it's the Godly. Did you ever hear that poem, "Living with the Saints Above?" Oh, that will be glory. Living with the saints below, well, that's another story.

Dr. James Dobson: Number seven. We just got time for it.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Number seven, you pray for them and you don't just say, "Lord, I commit them to you." No you pray for them that God will bless them, bless them, let them off the hook. Jesus didn't say, "I forgive you." He says, "Father, you forgive them." And when you pray for them to be blessed and you do it from the heart, you're there.

Dr. James Dobson: You were talking, R.T., about Joseph not letting them off the hook, his brothers off the hook. I'm not going to let you off the hook. We're not through with this conversation and we're out of time, but there's so much more to talk about. Will you be with us again next time?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Be delighted.

Dr. James Dobson: I want to talk first about what forgiveness is not because you have listed many things that forgiveness is not what people think it is and we'll talk about that next time. Thank you my friend. Appreciate you writing the book and coming to share those ideas with us.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, what incredible insights into the difficult topic of forgiveness here on Family Talk. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for part two of this dynamic conversation when R.T. Kendall will explain what forgiveness is not. Now, if you missed any part of today's program, just visit us online at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. You can easily share this important broadcast with a friend or loved one either from our website or right from your smartphone when you use the official JDFI Family Talk app as well, and we have a special opportunity available for you just during this month of December thanks to some very special friends of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

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6825. That's 877-732-6825. Thanks for remembering that we are only here because of listeners just like you, so thank you for your encouragement, your prayers, and for your financial support, and thanks for joining us today on the broadcast. Be sure to tune in again tomorrow as Dr. Dobson and Dr. R.T. Kendall continue their conversation on forgiveness. You won't want to miss it. 'Til then, I'm Roger Marsh and from all of us here at the JDFI, thanks for making us a part of your day.

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

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