



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: God's Tender Heart for Single Moms – Part 1

Guest(s): Angela Thomas-Pharr

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Being a parent can be challenging and at the same time very rewarding. Dr. James Dobson once said children represent God's most generous gift to us and for those who have no choice but to go it alone as a single parent, those demands are even greater. In today's classic Family Talk program, we're going to hear from bestselling author and speaker Angela Thomas Pharr. She'll share what she went through as she found herself newly divorced with four young children.

Angela will also talk about two of her books, the first one entitled *My Single Mom Life* and the second one, *Tender Mercies from Mother's Soul: Inspiration to Renew Your Spirit*. Angela Thomas Pharr is an alumna of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has earned her seminary degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. In the course of time, she met a wonderful man named Scott and they have been married now for over 15 years. Together they have four grown kids and several grandchildren. Angela's testimony is truly encouraging as she is living proof of God's redeeming love. And now let's join Angela Thomas Pharr and our own Dr. James Dobson, right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the single mom book is entitled *My Single Mom Life*, Angela Thomas. You have four children?

Angela Thomas Pharr: I do. Two girls and two boys.

Dr. James Dobson: You don't look old enough to have four children and most of them are either teenagers or about to be.

Angela Thomas Pharr: They are nine to 17 and I'm old enough to have had at least four more.

Dr. James Dobson: As you have written in this book, having four kids either approaching the teen years or there already is an exhausting responsibility.

Angela Thomas Pharr: It is.

Dr. James Dobson: You write about that, don't you?

Angela Thomas Pharr: It is. I do. I write about the journey.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the other book is called *Tender Mercy for a Mother's Soul*, and it's not written just to single mothers but to women generally.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: About how to meet their own needs while meeting the needs of their family.

Angela Thomas Pharr: You're right. How to care for your soul in the season of motherhood. That's what *Tender Mercy* is about.

Dr. James Dobson: You have a great commitment to Christ, don't you?

Angela Thomas Pharr: I do. I'm staking my whole life on the truth of Jesus Christ and His work and how it matters to surrender your life to God, your family, your children, the way you parent.

Dr. James Dobson: And you speak around the country with four kids. How do you do that?

Angela Thomas Pharr: Well, I'm the provider for us, and so I think God gave me one of the all-time coolest single mom jobs ever that I'm at home all week with the children. I leave Friday morning after I get them off to school and speak somewhere in some state and then get home usually Saturday night late, and so the kids know mom's away, but it's a cool job to be back home and to be there full-time mostly.

Dr. James Dobson: Angela, you were scheduled to be a guest six years ago.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Six years.

Dr. James Dobson: To talk about a similar subject.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: But at that time you were married and thought you would always be married, and as you approach the time to come here, your marriage began to fall apart.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: And against your wishes and will and commitment for your life, you couldn't hold it together. I don't know how much you are willing to tell us about that or how much you think you should. I know that you don't want to be disparaging to your ex-husband.

Angela Thomas Pharr: No.

Dr. James Dobson: Tell us as much as you want to about what happened.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Well, like many of your listeners, I was raised in a Christian home with parents. My parents this year have been married 46 years. They've modeled for me godliness, beautiful marriage, and so I have been trained well and I'm a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and I've been educated well, and personally made some very, very strong commitments to marriage and children and family, but there were very difficult years. In that time, in those years I went to my church and submitted myself to their authority, the elders, my pastor, the counselors, and so walking through the process of separation and divorce happened step by step under their leadership. Nothing happened until they gave a direction prayerfully.

Dr. James Dobson: Yet you were not the one who filed for divorce?

Angela Thomas Pharr: No.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we will leave that right there, but let's pick up with what that meant for you. You had always expected to be married and stay married. You were obviously committed to your family and yet it fell apart. What was that like? What was the day that the divorce was final like for you?

Angela Thomas Pharr: I think the finality of the divorce is a bit surreal. The day that was the most devastating was the day that I packed up laundry baskets of clothes for my children and put the kids in their car seats, picked up two at school and drove to my parents' house. That was the day, that was.

Dr. James Dobson: It's still tender today too, isn't it?

Angela Thomas Pharr: Sure.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Angela Thomas Pharr: As a woman who belongs to the Lord and it's the one thing you think you can avoid that you would not have to be a part of.

Dr. James Dobson: Angela, I'm sure you know, as you described this with tears in your eyes, that there are millions of other women out there who identify exactly with what you're saying.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Well, there is such a shame associated with divorce and an ongoing embarrassment for educated, bright, committed, tender women who love God and want to glorify Him with all their lives. And so there are women everywhere I go who I know when they bend their head and they move in close to me and whisper, I know what they're going to say. They will say, "Me too."

Dr. James Dobson: Was there an inordinate amount of apprehension or fear that you now had essentially the full responsibility for raising those four kids and for whatever financially that was going to mean in the future and all of a sudden you had it alone?

Angela Thomas Pharr: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: What was that like?

Angela Thomas Pharr: God has been good to me. I have an amazing family who has been supportive, the children and I lived there for four months.

Dr. James Dobson: You mean with your parents?

Angela Thomas Pharr: With my parents. And I did not know how I was going to provide for us, but I did know that I was healthy and that I would do anything God gave me to do. And so when we moved into a little rental house with nothing, it's the house that I came to call "the blessing." People would come over and I would say to them, "You want to see 'the blessing?'" Because it was a house that had furniture and dishes and a lawnmower and a man rented this house to us when we had nothing.

Dr. James Dobson: Literally nothing.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Literally, and no means, and yet I knew I would do anything that God gave to us.

Dr. James Dobson: You're really a survivor, aren't you?

Angela Thomas Pharr: God has been a provider.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you think of yourself that way then?

Angela Thomas Pharr: No. No. I assumed it was over because it seems like ... I don't know, maybe it's my background or no one ever taught me this, but it seems like as a woman who loves God when you are divorced, that the Lord is going to have to put a D on your back. And I had given my whole life to ministry and it seemed like God was going to say to me, "Angela, you still get to make Heaven, but I really can't use a woman like you."

Dr. James Dobson: Was that what was going on in your head at that time?

Angela Thomas Pharr: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Self-doubt. Self-condemnation.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Exactly. Maybe I should go to law school.

Dr. James Dobson: Guilt, a little guilt.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Exactly. Oh, huge.

Dr. James Dobson: A lot of guilt.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Shame. I have been a part of an amazing church and yet have encountered in different settings or with different people an unspoken judgment that is life taking. It sends you home doubting yourself. It sends you home wondering if that's what God thinks of you too.

Dr. James Dobson: How much of that came from your fellow Christians and how much of it was generated within yourself?

Angela Thomas Pharr: I think a good part of it comes from yourself. It came from me. The other big part of it comes from the body, from the Christians that you encounter who maybe have never ... You almost can't understand something you haven't walked through or you believe could be done differently or handled differently. Now, the broken Christians, they have a mercy to give, and when I began to meet some people who had also been broken and they began to give me just what I believe Jesus wanted, they began to give no condemnation, just like the Lord would give. And when I would encounter people who gave no judgment, they gave healing and mercy and grace and compassion. Then I came to understand, "Oh my goodness, it seems exactly like what the Father would give as well." And so my ministry has been about giving what has been given to me.

Dr. James Dobson: I know from your writings that you feel that that brokenness is now a tool that the Lord can use because people can identify with what they see in you because they're broken too.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Exactly. Life falls apart for a million reasons. It doesn't have to be divorce, health or sickness, different financial issues, but pain is pain, is pain, is pain. And when people know that you have encountered a deep and devastating pain, there's a connection in that. But I think that when you have been broken, it is perhaps the best thing I take into my future. I love better and my ministry is more effective because of the brokenness. I had been such a striver with regard to my faith that if you could do it, that's what I was going to do, whatever I could do for the Lord. And in my brokenness finally coming to understand all this time I have needed a Savior, and that when the Lord stoops down to save you from your circumstances, there is a knowing about your faith that I had never encountered before, a salvation from these circumstances. It is one thing entirely to know the theology of redemption. It is exactly different to live the truth of God's redemption, that he would take devastating circumstances and redeem them for his glory.

Dr. James Dobson: Angela, when you go off to speak on Saturday night and that you have connected with the crowd, is there a little group, a little cadre around you that

they see you as a life preserver, and if so, what do these women say to you? What do you hear?

Angela Thomas Pharr: God has given me such favor. Women are hurting and the healing that I can testify to, it's attractive because it comes from the Lord. And so they circle around me and normally they say, "Please don't go. Stay. We want to know more. We want to walk with you." And the testimony is that no matter what the circumstances, how dark they may be or when life turns out exactly how you never believed it could, when the walls cave in and the floor gives way, and when it looks like all hope is lost, when a man or a woman decides, "I will lay my life on the altar of God, where God is," whether it be that you lay your children, your single mom children on the altar, your single dad children, your home, your future, however dark and bleak it is, wherever God is, then life can still become amazing. And people need to know that. That's what God does.

You begin to understand why people make the choices they make, why they choose poorly. Because the pain is so intense and the emptiness is huge, and the loneliness, oh my goodness, it's overwhelming. And so I do understand why people begin to choose out of that loneliness. They choose to watch things or interact with people or see things that no one should see. My girlfriend called the other night and it was a Saturday night and my kids were away and I was at home and it was lonely. And she said, "What are you doing over there?" And I said, "Well, I am over here with all my integrity and it's lonely." And she said, "Well take that integrity and go to bed." Because when you are broken and empty and devastated, then the heart, and you begin to understand why people have done what they've done, but there is a choice.

Dr. James Dobson: This is the really sad aspect of that situation which we've all seen, which is where the self-doubt, low self-esteem, sense of condemnation, the guilt and that despair makes a woman particularly and a man too, but a woman especially, a sitting duck for a relationship that will make it much, much worse. And along come somebody who might not be committed to the same values, may not know Jesus Christ may have all kinds of baggage, and that woman may run past red flags all over the place and get herself into a mess that is just going to lead to perhaps another divorce.

She's thinking, "I need to find a husband. I need to find a father for those kids." You know that child abuse often comes out of that, because sometimes the motives of a man like that are pedophilia. Not always. I don't want to plant that seed, but that does happen and it's one of the reasons why the abuse of children sexually is so common in second and third and fourth marriages. So boy, you've just got to be guided by the Lord by every step at that point when you feel like your heart's going to break.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Exactly, and I think one of the most powerful things that we can do is be aware of our design and our weaknesses. Some days we have strong days and then more often than not, there is a weak moment or a weak day where I am trying to teach women to discern the difference between the voice of the Father and

the voice of the accuser because the accuser is the one who says to a woman in her weakness, "Well, you better take that man because it looks like that's all that's coming."

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, that's the last choice.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Or, "You should go that way," or, "You should interact with those people," or, "Maybe that momentary joy is all you're going to have, so just go for that." And you'd think, goodness gracious, I have that seminary degree and everything, but you can get turned around in your head and not realize that the voices that you hear and the words that you keep repeating to yourself are actually the words of the accuser. In 1 John four, we learn that the accuser who is not perfect love wants to keep reminding you of your sin or keep making you think that you deserve punishment.

And there are so many women who are laden with that kind of guilt when the truth of it is the Father says that you are forgiven and forgiveness really forgives for now and for all eternity. We're supposed to live in the celebration and in the glory of what has been given to us. The accuser attacks when you're empty, he gives this over and over accounting of your sin or where you missed the mark or what you could have done differently. He speaks into your ear, "Hey, you still deserve to be punished for that," and so a woman-

Dr. James Dobson: And God doesn't even love you. As a matter of fact.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: He's forgotten you.

Angela Thomas Pharr: And he's sending you to the back of the line.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Angela Thomas Pharr: And so she hangs her head and sits on the back pew at church and thinks that's all that she is entitled to.

Dr. James Dobson: And often sits on the back pew of the church alone because everybody seems to be married. You tell a story in the book about going to a Christmas service and looking around and everybody had a husband or wife.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Well, it's the perception because I went that Christmas Eve with my children. We slid in. I was so happy to be there with my children. It was a candlelight service. And of course people are there with their extended families, and I began to look around and it didn't seem like there was any other single mom in the whole entire church. I know there are single moms at my church, but I looked around and it seemed like there was a man and a woman and some kids and the grandparents and in-laws, and the truth of it is they could have been

third or fourth marriages, they could have been as dysfunctional as can be, but the perception.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, you're the only one.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Was that night, I'm the only one.

Dr. James Dobson: Angela, go back to the day that you decided you were going to make it. There was a specific day for you, wasn't it?

Angela Thomas Pharr: There was a day. We had moved into the blessing house, the house we were renting and there was furniture in the house, but not enough beds, and I did not have anything. I didn't have money. The only thing that I had was the diamond from my engagement ring, and somehow I qualified it in my mind that if I sold the diamond and used it for the children, that would be the right thing to do. And so I do remember vividly the day that I went to a jeweler there where I live and asked to see him and have the diamond in my pocket, and I thought, "Maybe this is the most embarrassing thing I've ever done." And as I was waiting for him, there was a man looking at engagement rings and I thought, "Oh my goodness, he's getting ready to begin and I'm ending it."

Dr. James Dobson: You're closing the door.

Angela Thomas Pharr: And the man who came from the back was obviously very busy and interacting with his employees all through the store, but he looked at me and I know that when he looked at me, he knew why I was there. And so when he came over, I said, "I was wondering if you buy diamonds." And he said, well, "Let me see," and I will always be grateful for a sweet little jeweler who treated me like I was trying to give him a deal on the Taj Mahal. He looked at my diamond and said, "Just a minute, let me look at this." And he told me he'd be happy to buy my diamond for \$1,400 dollars. And so he went in the back and came out with a check and I had these big crocodile tears in my eyes, and all he said to me that day was, "I'm very sorry."

Dr. James Dobson: My goodness.

Angela Thomas Pharr: And I took the check next door to the bank and I cashed the check and I took the cash three doors down to the furniture store and I bought bunk beds for the kids, and I thought, "Well, we have beds. We're going to make it."

Dr. James Dobson: We're going to make it. Did you sense the leading of the Lord in getting through that day?

Angela Thomas Pharr: If there was any strength about me, it had to have come from the Lord. Those months were the weakest months I'd ever known in my life.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Angela, we have two books here that you have written and I hope to transition from one to the other, but we're still talking about the first one, which is *My Single Mom Life: Stories and Practical Lessons For Your Journey*. We today have only just started the unfolding of your experience, which you then turn around and use to reach out to others who are where you were then, with very practical advice, very specific suggestions, and most of all, empathy. You use a book to put an arm around people, don't you?

Angela Thomas Pharr: I hope so. I pray that. I pray that the book is like passing my notes back, that some mom can avoid some hole I stepped in because of the lessons I've learned.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the other book, as we indicated at the top of the program is *Tender Mercy For a Mother's Soul*. And there you're talking to women generally, and we will just continue next time and transition from the first book to the second. I often say this on a program when I have people here who are sharing difficult moments. It's very easy to come here and talk about how everything's wonderful, but you know what? Life is difficult for everybody. There's no one that doesn't stub their toe and sometimes experience things a lot worse than that.

And to come here and admit that, you talked about being embarrassed when you sold your ring, I'm sure that every time you talk about this, there is a little bit of grief, a lump in your throat that this is not what you wanted. This is not what you had in mind. It's not what you thought would happen, but it's the life you have and you're making the most of it, and God is using it by your being willing to open yourself and let people see it. I know, I've been doing this for 30 years, I can feel when things go out of these microphones and out to places all across the country and around the world, and I can feel coming back those passions from people who are saying, "That's me. That's what I've gone through, and she really does understand where I am."

Angela Thomas Pharr: I think the Lord sends me out sometimes just for that one purpose. "Hey, ladies and gentlemen, we have Angela Thomas, a broken down Jesus girl. We'd like for you to see what it looks like when God stoops down to pick up a broken woman. Hey, would you stand up, Angela? Thanks. You can sit down." Just to show what it looks like, that God stoops over in His mercy and stands up even the broken for His glory.

Roger Marsh: Well, what an encouraging conversation featuring Angela Thomas Pharr and our own Dr. James Dobson today here on Family Talk, but that's just half of Angela's story. Be sure to join us again tomorrow as Angela will share about her book, *Tender Mercies For a Mother's Soul: Inspiration to Renew Your Spirit* as she continues her discussion with Dr. Dobson.

Looking ahead, as the school year is beginning for kids, we know that there is a battle going on for their hearts and minds as well. Even their gender is under attack, so how can Christians effectively engage with and address the rising tide

of transgenderism in our culture? Well, Dr. Owen Strachan has written a book called *What Does The Bible Teach About Transgenderism?*

He has a unique understanding of the complexities involved in this issue, and his insights can help deepen your perspective on this vital issue as well. In collaboration with Dr. Strachan, the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute has compiled a wide range of helpful resources for you on this topic. To access them right now, just visit drjamesdobson.org/transgenderism. That's drjamesdobson.org/transgenderism. Thanks so much for listening to Family Talk today. I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of everyone here at the JDFI, we appreciate you making us a part of your regular routine. Join us again tomorrow for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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