



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: God's Tender Heart for Single Moms – Part 2

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: Welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. There are many circumstances that can lead a mom or a dad to become a single parent, and during that time, they can struggle to manage all of the responsibilities of raising children while supporting a household all on their own. In addition, there is the inevitable pain, heartbreak, and maybe even guilt. They are most likely fighting loneliness and hopefully finding support from friends or loved ones as well. But a promise that God makes in His word is that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Returning to the Family Talk program today is best-selling author and speaker Angela Thomas-Pharr. Angela shares more about challenges she faced as a single mom and how God encouraged her and strengthened her along her journey. Angela will also be talking about her book entitled *Tender Mercy for a Mother's Soul: Inspiration to Renew Your Spirit*. Angela Thomas-Pharr earned her seminary degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. She also remarried to a wonderful man named Scott who she's been married to now for over 15 years. What a blessing that is. Together they have four grown kids and make their home in North Carolina. Let's join Angela Thomas-Pharr and our own Dr. James Dobson right now, right here, on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Angela, we were talking last time about some very painful experiences in your life when your marriage fell apart. Wasn't what you wanted, it wasn't what you expected, it changed absolutely everything, I'm sure, your friends, your expectations for the future, your financial circumstances and your relationship with your children. And we didn't get to that last very important item, and yet every single mother who's out there, and single fathers too, let's don't forget them, they're in pain too. But let's talk a little bit about your kids. When you became aware that the marriage was over and that you had been divorced and it was going to be final before very long and you don't have any money and you have the responsibility for these four kids, adolescence is coming. And how in the world are you going to be able to be everything that a mother and a father ought to do with these children? What was your thought process? How did the

kids react? Describe for us what that experience is like because there are many people out there who have gone through it and will go through it.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Exactly. The thing about divorce and becoming a single mom and co-parenting and the process with the children is that no one prepares for it because it was never going to happen to us. And we don't take the class or read the book to prepare ahead of time and so we stumble through this. And some stumbling produces great lessons and some stumbling produces great pain. And so the one thing I'm absolutely sure of at this point is this is not how God intended for children to be raised. They should live in a home with a mom and dad who love each other and are committed to them growing up in strength and in power. But the question became for me, "How now shall we live?" This is the way it is and this is how it is going to be. I'm divorced and I'm a single mom. How does a divorced single mom live for the glory of God? How do you raise children in a home underneath the covering of the Lord?

Dr. James Dobson: How did you protect them? What did you tell them? I don't want to invade your story. I don't want to embarrass your ex-husband. That's not what we're here to do.

Angela Thomas Pharr: No. Never.

Dr. James Dobson: But how did you keep your own emotion, probably some anger and bitterness, there usually is, from infecting these kids?

Angela Thomas Pharr: At the beginning I had to make some decisions about how I would speak to them about circumstances and I have tried to speak to them truthfully, to say in truth what has happened, in truth the decisions that were made. For several months would try to cover a lot of things or whitewash issues with them. And after speaking to a counselor, she said, "Well, Angela, you have to, it is important for the children, that you don't whitewash, but that you are compassionate and tender and address things with them as they are able to understand and receive."

And then since the divorce, raising the children now, you begin to understand immediately that you have to focus on the things that matter most. And always hands down the things that mattered were issues of the heart. Looking into their eyes, speaking to them, interacting with them every day. The little things had to go away, like matching socks in the laundry room. For goodness sake, I could waste half of our lives trying to match those socks. Now they're in a basket and you just find two. Do the best you can. Because little things have to be laid down, especially if you're living as a single mom or a single dad. So that sitting on the bed at night and brushing hair and interacting with my children, making sure that they know I'm committed and care about their individuality, being fascinated with their details, that matters. And if I'm wearing myself out about dust and ironing, well then you know how that's going to go.

And so there was this big transition for me of laying down how I thought I was going to run my house and how I thought my home would look or how we would be. I remember going somewhere the other day and my kids, they looked like teenagers look, gym shorts and some raggedy shirt and a hat this way and whatever kind of shoes. And I remember thinking, "This was not how it was going to be. They were going to be perfect and cute." And yet their hearts are good. So that matters more.

Dr. James Dobson: What you're saying, Angela, is that it is possible to do that job very, very well. You have to change some things. You have to give up some things. You have to change your idealistic perspectives on it. But I think of my wife's mother. And she was saddled with the responsibility like you of raising two kids who very quickly became teenagers. And she had no money. I mean they had nothing. And she was determined to hold that little family together by herself. And she worked in a fish cannery. She would get up at 3:00 in the morning to meet the boats that came in and work in the cannery. And she made such an impact on her two children. She was such a great mom in a very difficult circumstance. It is possible to do that, isn't it?

Angela Thomas Pharr: And your wife is a testimony to that.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes, she is.

Angela Thomas Pharr: I am deciding that where God is, these kids can still turn out okay, and they can become amazing grownup adults and that sometimes we just can't read the statistics because we belong to the God of Heaven and earth. We belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who comes in and covers my broken down home and my broken down family with the blood that He shed for us. And so that has to make a difference.

Dr. James Dobson: How are you praying in those days? What were you saying to the Lord? Was there despair or was there hope?

Angela Thomas Pharr: There were moments of despair. And I think I prayed just minute to minute, "Show me what to do now." I couldn't believe for the future yet. I was still struggling in my own little limited sight. I had so many plans and they were all done. So now, "Show me what for now."

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Angela Thomas Pharr: I know when women go through divorce that there are months and for some years of what feels like shock. You know that the kids are fed and they obviously have clothes on and they went to school and went on their field trip, but you can't remember how all that happened because you just move into some gear where you are numb and providing. But I hope that women hear us say today there is a grieving that comes in this kind of brokenness, but I hope that they hear us say, "The Lord can lift you up." He really can.

Dr. James Dobson: And with His help you can do it.

Angela Thomas Pharr: He can give you a hope you had not dreamed was possible.

Dr. James Dobson: Now this book that we're talking about today, *Tender Mercy*, is not just focused on the single mother but women generally because in a fast pace, better said, breathless lifestyle, almost every family that I know is going too fast. I don't know any family that gets up in the morning and say, "Well, what are we going to do today?" And there's hopefully time for that, but most days are pretty tough. How does a woman maintain her own sanity, her own physical body, her own spiritual relationship with the Lord? How does she get all that done?

Angela Thomas Pharr: What I decided years ago, several years ago, was that probably the most powerful gift I could give to my children for the purpose of life change and their future would be that they would grow up in the same home with a spiritually mature woman, a woman who was godly and righteous and growing in her faith. But I had four kids in seven years. And so you know in those little years, those little children years, it is almost virtually impossible to grow in your faith or to find that time with the Lord. And so when I wrote *Tender Mercy*, we jokingly called it "How to be a Mama and Still Love God" because there is so much involved in caring for the little ones. But if that truth holds, that the best most important thing we can give to them is godliness and righteousness, a personal walk that is growing, then we will have to choose even in the busiest of years to pursue God.

And people will make you feel guilty and they'll say, "You have to have your quiet time first thing every morning." But if you've been up all night with two or three babies or one and you can't get up early, they beat you up already. They've already awakened before you have. And so I had to figure out how does a woman in this season get with the Lord?

I remember years, Grayson, my second born, he would cry through the night. He would be up. He was up every night four or five times a night for months. And so when I would get that kid in the baby swing during the day, he didn't want me to leave the room. He would cry if I left the room. So I learned how to be with the Lord while he was in the baby swing. I would lay under the swing and pray, until Grayson was done or until the swing was done. Now of course that means nobody's in there folding towels and no one is deciding what's for dinner. But that is the kind of choosing that fills the soul, that gives you what you can give to your children.

Dr. James Dobson: Angela, have you ever had the Lord say to you, not audibly, but you knew He communicated it with you, "Angela, I want you to know something. I know that you are frail in terms of the amount of work that's expected of you. I remember your frame. I know that you are dust. And I know you're not perfect, but I want you to know I'm standing with you and you're going to do the best you can and I'm going to help you and it's going to be okay and let me carry it." Have you ever had Him reassure you like that?

Angela Thomas Pharr: Oh my goodness. Psalm 103, one of my favorite Psalms where the Lord says, "I know you're just dust." And I remember vividly standing at the kitchen counter in my little house. And I had three children at home. One had just begun school. And it was the time of day where you begin to make dinner. And the kids wanted me, somebody wanted me to read a book and somebody wanted me to play with a thing and someone wanted something else. And I, for at least 30 minutes had been saying to them, "Not now, just a minute. Mama will be there in a little while." But I could feel on the inside this frustration building, like, "If they would just leave me alone, I could do what I'm supposed to do. If these little kids would just bug off."

I was standing there, had something on the stove and standing at the sink and I knew the Lord said to me, in my spirit, "Would you stop being mad about being the mama?" I turned off the stove and finished at the sink and I went into the dining room and sat on the floor. And you know what happens as the mom when you sit on the floor. They come.

Dr. James Dobson: Here they come.

Angela Thomas Pharr: And they're climbing on you and bringing their books. And so I was tying someone's shoe and wiping someone's nose and they were just climbing on my head and it was as if all that frustration drained out of me because the Lord needed to remind me what mattered.

Dr. James Dobson: The Scripture that I think of that means a lot to me was the story in Matthew where Jesus had obviously been pulled on from all sides. He had been healing people. Who knows what that experience was like when the word spread throughout the entire country of Israel that He was healing people. Everybody in the world has got something they want healed. And He had to have been drained and He had to have already given everything that He had to give. So He came down to the seashore and there were all these people waiting for Him and who knows what disorders and diseases they had. Some were blind, some were lame, some had cancer and diseases that weren't even known then. But they needed Him. And He came down to the seashore, walked past them and got in a boat and rode off because He had given all He could give.

And it comes a time when we've given all we can give. There are times when maybe it's not as strenuous as raising four little kids at home, but by the end of the day, I've been yanked in about 800 directions. And I will get in my car and go home and Shirley understands, she sees it in my eyes when I've had that kind of day. And the Lord understands that. And I don't go sit down for a lengthy Bible study, I go to bed if that's what is required. There is a time and the Lord understands that. He knows, He remembers our frame.

Angela Thomas Pharr: He knows it's just you. I remember learning that with the children I was never going to be able to get alone, for that restoration. I wanted to get in a boat and row away, but goodness gracious, there's nowhere to go when you have those little kids. And so you can't shut the door or they come bang on the door. And

I've realized that I was just going to have to be with God anyway. It seemed like I was taught quiet time was where you're alone, but I'm just going to have to do this anyway.

And so I put in a video or something for the kids, go in my room, leave the door open so they wouldn't be afraid, and lay there on my carpet with my face in the floor. And I remember the children, one time, William, the little one came by, and said, "Mama, what were you doing in there?" I said, "Baby, I was praying." He said, "Well, it looked like you were sleeping." Well, it's been known to happen. But when you do that, I mean they will come and crawl on your head and mess with your hair and play with you and talk to you. But what more beautiful testimony to give to those children than a woman who is laying on her face before the Lord?

Dr. James Dobson: We're talking to Angela Thomas, who has written a number of books including the two that we are talking about, one today, *Tender Mercy for the Mother's Soul: Inspiration to Renew Your Spirit*, which is what we're talking about here. And last time we were talking with Angela Thomas about her book, *My Single Mom Life: Stories and Practical Lessons for Your Journey*. I think the emphasis there is on the word practical. And we've been talking about experiential things to this point, but there is a lot of advice, practical advice, in both of these books. In one of the chapters you talk about a woman of grace. What do you mean by that?

Angela Thomas Pharr: Well, the woman of grace that I am learning about is the woman who wants to give to her children what Jesus has already given. And so that means you lay down this idea that they will be perfect children and understand your calling as their mom. A woman of grace for me means that the kids are going to ride their bikes through the yard and make tracks and the grass isn't going to grow there and there's going to be a whole lot more dirt in my house than I anticipated there would be because I want to be the home where the kids hang out. The woman of grace is the one who stays up to talk long past bedtime because that's what the children need more than anything. And the woman of grace is the one who says, "Yeah, let all those kids stay for dinner with us. I brought home six tacos. I can cut them in half and we'll figure it out."

I believe it is our responsibility as mothers to keep the boundaries up what is allowed in the home, and yet that this place would be fun and inviting. I remember as a child that I wasn't allowed to sit on the counter. It was almost near sin to sit on the kitchen counter. That was bad. And so I thought about it for a while. I don't know that that's all that bad. And one of my daughter's favorite things, my teenage daughter, is to sit on the kitchen counter and talk to me. It's like I'm giving her something special. Now, she's not allowed to muck up the house or to muck up the kitchen, but there is that.

Dr. James Dobson: She can sit on the counter.

Angela Thomas Pharr: She can sit on the counter.

- Dr. James Dobson: You talk in this book also about the importance of girlfriends, of finding somebody who has gone through similar things or one you can have fun with, just to get out with, especially when the kids get in school.
- Angela Thomas Pharr: Exactly. And someone who challenges you to run a little faster toward the Lord. It's been important for me to line myself up with some women spiritually who are running after God because they make me want to pick up the pace. Like, "Wait a minute. I don't want to be left behind. I don't want to know God like that too."
- Dr. James Dobson: Angela, we've got about three minutes left. I'd like you to address this in conclusion. We're talking to a lot of women out there who are overwhelmed. The house is a mess. They got kids that they are trying to take care of and not feeling very good about the way they're doing it. Just the thought of cooking another meal and cleaning it up and homework and getting their kids bathed and all that that means. And three words jump out, four words, "Where do I begin? How do I get a handle on my life? I'm out of control. And I have no idea where to start. How do I do that?"
- Angela Thomas Pharr: I hope it will encourage the women who are listening to know that God sees. He sees you, standing in your laundry room, doing the things that nobody will ever say thank you for. He sees you trudge through the middle of the night to retuck those princess sheets and put that superhero back in bed. He sees that you mop the kitchen floor after everyone went to bed, and nobody will ever say thank you for that.
- Dr. James Dobson: And it still wasn't enough.
- Angela Thomas Pharr: But He lets you connect the dots. And so maybe not all of it. You don't have to get them all raised today or get the home perfect today, but God lets you decide where you can begin. I remember vividly in my darkest, most depressed days, the grieving days, when I didn't think I could do the next thing. It was as if the Lord tenderly said to me, "Hey, baby girl, what do you think you can do?" "Well, I think I could unload the dishwasher." "Okay, go get them." And then when that little job was done, the Lord again, "Hey, baby? What could you do now?" And God is so gracious when your spirit is weary and you feel overwhelmed to tenderly let you begin to connect the dots that will become this beautiful picture of what He has begun in your heart and in your home. And so today, maybe it's just one dot to the next.
- Dr. James Dobson: Remind us of the ages of your children.
- Angela Thomas Pharr: Today they are 9, 11, 14, and 17.
- Dr. James Dobson: So you're going to have four teenagers before very long. I don't want you to take more credit for what you've done than you ought to, because the Lord has led you in it, but there is some credit there. Do you ever just kind of smile and

say, "I've done pretty well. Given what I had to work with when I started, I'm doing all right. I feel good about myself."

Angela Thomas Pharr: I think some days I sit back, and years ago I would say, because it's all I knew to say, "The Lord will be faithful. I believe God's going to show up. I think He's really going to take care of us." And there are days now I sit back and go, "Look what He's done. He has. I knew He was going to be faithful." There is the doubting sometimes in between, but it truly is a blessing to watch their little lives unfold and see how God is taking care of us.

Roger Marsh: Well, God is definitely our true provider. I'm reminded of the words of Isaiah Chapter 41, Verse 10, which read, "So do not fear, for I am with you, says the Lord. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." That's a powerful reminder indeed. And that was the conclusion of this two-part conversation featuring Angela Thomas-Pharr and our own Dr. James Dobson here on Family Talk. Now, if you missed any part of the conversation, remember you can listen again on our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

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