



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** My Wynter Season – Part 2

**Guest(s):** Jonathan Pitts

**Air Date:** March 23, 2021

[Listen to the broadcast](#)

- 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.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: You're listening to Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, your host. Our special guest today is Jonathan Pitts. He has a new book out called My Wynter Season: Seeing God's Faithfulness in the Shadow of Grief.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: Yesterday, we had an amazing discussion about Jonathan and his wife Wynter, the horrific scene, the loss that happened, the loss of her life and its impact on their family. Today, we're going to look at what the journey to healing looks like for Jonathan, the grief that the kids have encountered, and how to help them through that process and so much more.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: In the end, it's ultimately about God's faithfulness and his goodness, his steadfast love in the midst of some of the most dark seasons of life. Jonathan, welcome back. The book we're talking about is My Wynter Season: Seeing God's Faithfulness in the Shadow of Grief. Again, it's such a beautiful book. What attribute to your wife Wynter.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan, let's start on day two by just coming back in and focusing on you a little bit more. I remember there's a piece, I think you had a friend, Brian, back in 2019, who just looked at you and said, "JP, Jonathan, I know you're doing all this work. I know you've got everything under control, but how are you? How are you doing?"
- Dr. Tim Clinton: And Jonathan, when somebody steps into our life like that and they slow us way down and we have to get introspective, we look inside. We often don't want to. If you're like me you carry a lot of weight on your shoulders. You fix everything. But you often don't take time to take care of yourself. I know I have that habit. I have that disease, if you will. Jonathan, how are you?
- Jonathan Pitts: Yeah, it's interesting. I'm good now. It was like the beginning of '19, about six months after losing Wynter, where I began to actually allow myself to feel and allow myself to grieve and not be the guy that has to fix everything and have to

just be right for everybody else. So what's beautiful is I can say now in March of 2021, that because I decided and owned my own grief, I'm now in a place where I can begin to move forward and process forward.

Jonathan Pitts: I'm actually in a committed relationship right now, which is awesome and beautiful, and God's just been really kind. I never thought I'd love again, and I'm finding myself loving again. My girls are in a healthy place. I've got basically four teenagers in my home, which wasn't the case when Wynter passed. So I'm in a good place, and it's been a pretty crazy two and a half going on three year journey.

Jonathan Pitts: I actually was in bed last night and I thought, Oh my gosh, I can't believe it's almost been three years. I can't believe it's almost been three years. In some ways it feels like it was just yesterday, and in some ways it feels like it was 10 years ago. But I'm grateful to say I'm in a good place. I'm still struggling with that need to do everything and be there for everybody and be the guy that can't just ... It's spring break week and I'm in the office right now. So that says a little bit about that. But yeah, but I'm in a good place, man. Thanks for asking. I do feel like I'm in a great place.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan, that doesn't mean there isn't sorrow. That doesn't mean you don't miss her. One of the things that I noticed that I think you guys have done really well, and that is you continue to honor Wynter. You don't ignore her presence, her significance and more in your family.

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah. Yeah. It's been interesting, because that was the thing that I wanted to do more than anything else was make sure that we did honor her. I always wanted to make sure with my girls that they never felt uncomfortable with her name in their mouth. So we just talk about Wynter all the time as if she were still there, not trying to ignore the reality of what happened, but just that they'd never feel uncomfortable talking about their mom.

Jonathan Pitts: So they don't now. We talk about her all the time. It doesn't come with sadness all the time. Sometimes it does. But oftentimes it just comes with like, "Hey daddy, remember that time you and mommy got in that fight," which was, I don't know, three months before she passed away, "And we also almost didn't make it to the steakhouse because mommy said she wasn't going to go with you?"

Jonathan Pitts: Even moments like that, where they can feel free to talk about that, and that's okay. We're human. We've tried to honor her well, and it's interesting because now I feel like what we're doing, especially because my life is changing now, is we're trying to ... The only word I can use is renovation. We're not trying to build a new home that is separate from the world and the story that I had with Wynter. But we're trying to renovate, to take what was from our old story into the future in ways that continue to honor and ways that continue to keep the memory of who Wynter was to us alive, especially for my girls.

Jonathan Pitts: But there's new coming in now, and it's really beautiful that the two can co-exist. The newness of life that God is giving doesn't mean that what was can't be a part of our story. It has to be. It's my history, it's my life.

Jonathan Pitts: That comes with its own challenges though too, by the way, just moving into new relationships. I've stayed in counseling through this process just trying to always have a voice of reason and a voice of health. It's just a really hard thing that you walk through with your kids as you move into a new phase of grief. Because new relationships for you actually mean new phases of grief for them and new phases of grief for you as well. It's just really interesting.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan, how are the girls? You have four of them, Alena, Kaitlyn, Camryn, and Olivia.

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah, they're good. They've all grieved in their own ways. Alena's talked about hers really publicly. She was really angry in the beginning, and it's really been beautiful to watch a lot of her, because she would say anger is her baseline, baseline motivation. But it's been really beautiful to watch her walk into a new place of joy in her life.

Jonathan Pitts: She's now 16. She'll be 17 next month, and so finding joy. What's funny is she's talked about this publicly as well, which is the only reason I say it, but feeling guilty for being joyful and being hopeful for the first time in a couple of years. It's really beautiful to find her there and to see her there and to see the lightness that's on her.

Jonathan Pitts: Kaitlyn's doing well. Kaitlyn is the life of the party and my number two. She just turned 14 and has beautiful friendships here in Franklin.

Jonathan Pitts: My twins, Camryn and Olivia, we call them fire and ice, sugar and spice, two different personalities. But they're doing well as well and growing up and moving into their teenage years.

Jonathan Pitts: So the thing I would say about my girls is all 4 of them, the word that defines them is resilient. They're four the resilient little girls that I'm really proud of. Very human, but very resilient.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I remember my sister, Wendy, when my mother died, Jonathan. She was almost 30, but she said, "Tim, most 30 year olds still have a grandma. I don't have a grandma and I don't have a mom." I stepped back from that conversation, and I thought about Wendy, and now I'm thinking about your four girls.

Dr. Tim Clinton: They've got life in them, Jonathan. God's done some work in their hearts, but this has been a unique journey for each one of them. And I wanted to ask you, maybe you could help our listeners today too, some of them are going through it. I saw this, one in five kids will experience the death of someone close to them by age 18. There's a lot of people listening right now, and they're going to say,

"Tim, ask him, what is the most important piece to the puzzle? What is the most significant thing he was able to do to help them through their grief?"

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah. That's a tough question, and probably a long answer. But ultimately, I think the best thing I could do is be the healthiest version of myself. Because I had moments where I wasn't healthy, especially when I was codependent on them. It made them feel this pressure that they had to be something for me, they had to be happy for me or they had to hide this or hide that. So I think being the healthiest version of yourself so they can feel safe with you. There are moments where my girls didn't feel safe, not like they felt threatened-

Dr. Tim Clinton: That's a big word. That's a big word, feeling safe.

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah, and I want to define that. They never felt fear of abuse or something like that, but ultimately not feeling safe to just be themselves and even in their grief, not feeling safe to be angry or feeling safe to be sad because they had to manage dad. There were moments where that happened. So me being the healthiest version of myself, which is allowing them be themselves is probably the best thing I could do.

Jonathan Pitts: You talk about moms though, yeah, there's a reality that my girls don't have their mom. I'm thankful that they have surrogates around my sister who literally moved in with me two weeks after Wynter passed, has been with me, helping me. Single, never been married, no kids and she's become a surrogate mom to my girls. God sent lots of women in their lives, aunties and just different women.

Jonathan Pitts: But there's still this thing that's missing. My daughter's written a book called Motherless Daughters, I think it's called, secular book. It talks about the reality of not having a mom looks like something forever for the rest of your life. So weddings and proms and all the different things she's going to go through, there's always going to be this reminder that your mom's not there when everybody else's mom is there.

Jonathan Pitts: It comes with real difficulty. In that the only thing I can do is pray. I just pray that God would provide, pray that God would fill gaps. Because ultimately they just need to lean into Him just like I'm leaning in Him.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I like what you said, being the best version of yourself that you can be.

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You need to be the best dad that you can be to them. And yes, a dad who's attuned to each one of your daughters, because they're unique.

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Your oldest might need words of affirmation. Your youngest might need help. Being attuned, finding that emotional energy to be there while at the same time taking care of yourself, that's a lot.

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah. It's funny because the way when I'm not healthy, I'm not present. I'm not being a bad dad. I'm being responsible. I'm praying with them. I'm at dinner with them. But ultimately they can tell I'm absent. Like in my head I'm thinking about other things, I'm somewhere else. So being the best version of myself is being present to them where they can actually see that I'm with them, feel that I'm with them. So essentially it's a very soft thing.

Jonathan Pitts: But I think about that you get on an airplane and they tell you if the cabin pressure is lost put your own mask on before you put your child's mask on and how important that is. So when I think about being the best version of yourself, it looks like that. It's like putting your own mask on so that you can actually help them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're listening to Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, your host. Our special guest today is Jonathan Pitts. He has a new book out called My Wynter Season: Seeing God's Faithfulness in the Shadow of Grief. Talking about really it's a tribute to his wife Wynter, talking about his family, his girls right now and more. Jonathan, you had mentioned that you're dating and you're bringing someone else into the picture. How's that been for you personally, and then how is it for the girls?

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah. Personally it's been a wonderful, beautiful surprise from heaven. It actually came along, a friend of mine, he just asked if I was dating. And I was like, "No, I'm just taking care of my girls and right now the only date I have is golf. I golf just by myself and if God brings somebody along, so be it. But I'm not looking." He goes, "Well I have a friend. She's 40. She's single. She loves Jesus. Are you interested?" I was just like, "Is she crazy?" He was like, "She's not crazy."

Jonathan Pitts: So anyway, our first date was Zoom and she has a massive story and I have a massive story and we literally just shared stories. It was the beginning of this really beautiful friendship that would lead to romance that has me in a really committed relationship right now that's really beautiful. What's interesting is I've never done this before.

Jonathan Pitts: I've got four daughters, and so the process looks different than dating and moving into commitment when you don't have kids. So I'm having to bring my girls along on this journey. Her name is Pita.

Jonathan Pitts: I'll never forget Pita saying to me like, "Oh wow, I'm actually an instrument for your daughter's grief." Realizing that her presence was this catalyst to more grief for them. What's beautiful is that she's carried that really well and has been really attractive.

Jonathan Pitts: But I'm really happy and my girls are doing really well, have good relationships with her. But it's a whole new thing. It's new for everybody and it's a new process.

Jonathan Pitts: I used the word renovation earlier. It is a renovation, and it requires leaning into awkward spaces and repair and trying to figure it all out on the fly. House has already been built and we're renovating it. So it's a fun word to think about because renovations can be really beautiful if you just stick with them. That's where we're at now.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan, you had mentioned song has a special significance for you, especially in the grieving process. If you go all the way back, I had read that you sang to Wynter as she was dying. Can you take us on a journey here?

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah. Song has been really important to me my entire life. I grew up in a singing family and theology has been just in music for us. So in my best moments and in my hardest moments, even when I was young, we sang, just trusting God. I sang to Wynter at our wedding.

Jonathan Pitts: It was really interesting, I was pacing outside of the ER, the room that they were operating on Wynter. A doctor came out, a young doctor. I remember him, remember his face even. He just said, "Hey, we had a pulse but we've lost it. You might want to come and say goodbye to your wife."

Jonathan Pitts: So I walked in that room and I didn't know what I was going to do, but I knelt down beside her. I was on her right side. The machine was still pumping her chest even, and it was just like chaos in that room. But for a moment, it was literally just me and her. I could have cared less what was happening.

Jonathan Pitts: I just put my face down beside her face, and I remember my tears from my left eyes just hitting her right cheek and I just said, "It's okay, babe. It's going to be okay. I'll take care of the girls. It's okay." I just began instinctively to sing, and I just sang, "It's your breath in our lungs, so we pour out a praise, pour out a praise. It's your breath in our lungs, so we pour out a praise to you only. Great are your Lord. I just signed that through a couple of times.

Jonathan Pitts: I think in that moment thinking back on it, I was reminding her of where she was going while at the same time reminding myself of the fact that the breath of my lungs is still here because God still has purpose. So we can both sing and worship and rejoice because both things can be true at once. Se can be going home, I can still be living in this purpose that God gave me.

Jonathan Pitts: I went to the waiting room after that and told my girls about their mom being gone. After I told them that she's with Jesus, those are the words I used, your mommy went home to be with Jesus, we sang Good, Good Father.

Jonathan Pitts: Then that night went home to my brother-in-law's house where we stayed. I couldn't go back to the house we were at. We went to my brother-in-law's house and we laid on a guest bedroom bed together, all those girls on top of me. I don't even remember what we sang. We just sang because I had no other words for them. So I just sang and some of them would join me and we would just worship together.

Jonathan Pitts: It was really painful and really difficult and we just worshiped. That's all we had. What's beautiful about song, especially when you're singing worship is you're just singing truths over yourself. That somehow some way, it didn't heal us in the moment, but at least carried us through the moment.

Jonathan Pitts: So I'm grateful for song for that, and we've been singing ever since, man. We just continue to sing. Beautiful moments, tough moments, we just continue to sing.

Dr. Tim Clinton: How do you keep your confidence in God? How do you keep trusting him Jonathan? I know you have a song in your heart, but you're a man. I remember my dad saying, "Tim, it's in the middle of the night when I reach over for your mom and she's not there. Those are the tough moments in my life."

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah. There's just been so much that I've had to be dependent on Him for. First, it was raising my girls, continue to raise them. Next it was honoring Wynter's legacy and carrying her ministry on and having no idea how to do that. God would send me so much resource and so many people that have helped me carry that on.

Jonathan Pitts: Next it would be pastoring at a church I'd never been at, while grieving, while leading a ministry that my wife had left. Then it would be owning my grief journey and just being there. There was so much dependence on God for all of it.

Jonathan Pitts: Then it would be, now, this new relationship I'm in and how much difficulty that can bring. It's beautiful, but it can bring difficulty. So I think just always ... It hasn't been hard to have a heart oriented towards dependence because I've just walked through a lot. You mentioned weight, it's felt like weight. I've had lots of weight on my shoulders and some days it feels lighter to carry and other days it feels really heavy. So it's pushing myself towards dependence, reminding myself that I need to be dependent on God, that I actually can't carry it without Him.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Any scriptures that have really anchored in your heart to give you strength?

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah. The constant theme for me, Psalm 34:7, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he rescues them." I look at my story and really the theme of the book is it's a bunch of stories about how God's rescued me and how he's rescued me through his people. Every story that I have of God being faithful and God being kind, kind was really the word I can use. God's loving

kindness towards me has come through a person. None of it's come without people.

Jonathan Pitts: Even now, as I find myself in a good place, I would say I'm mostly healed, I guess, as healed as I'm ever going to be I think. But there's so many people that have surrounded me that continue to surround me and God's faithful through his people.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I think Wynter was the inspiration for Kirk Franklin song Wynter's Promise, which was featured on his Grammy award winning album Long, Live, Love.

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's just an amazing work. Again, a tribute, reflecting on Wynter's life.

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah, it's a beautiful moment. I'll never forget. It was a November night, super dark, 4:30 in the afternoon, just really dark and sad time of year for me. It was November of '18, so it was the same year Wynter passed away.

Jonathan Pitts: Kirk actually called me and he said, "Hey, Light skin," that's what he calls me. He's called me that for 20 years now. I remember he was at the funeral, which really to me just spoke to how impactful her life was on him. He just said, "I wrote this song and it's about this hope for heaven and this longing heaven, and I want to name it Wynter's Promise. Are you okay with that?" I was obviously honored and was blown away. Then he said, "But one more thing I want to add, would you be open to your daughter, Alena singing on the song?" I was at that point just blown away, and I just said, "Well, that'd be up to her. I'll ask her."

Jonathan Pitts: Long story short, the next month, December 24th, five month anniversary of Wynter's passing and Christmas Eve, we were in Kirk's studio recording that song. If you listen to it, you can hear the pain in Alena's voice as she speaks at the end and sings at the end. It's really, he calls it an honest pain, and that's who Alena is. She carries this honest pain that comes out in music. One of the greatest honors ever, especially because it's on a Grammy award winning album called Long, Live, Love.

Jonathan Pitts: The love we know is eternal, Long, Live, Love and one of the great joys and one of those moments like, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and he rescues them." He rescued me through this crazy moment of allowing our family to be involved in something that would actually be a part of healing.

Jonathan Pitts: People I don't even know now will email me, message me on Instagram and say, "Hey, I found your story through the song, Wynter's Promise," and just go on and talk about how it's meant to them and that's not of my doing. I don't love what I'm going through, but I'm honored that God would use it.



Dr. Tim Clinton: We're fighting time Jonathan, but I wanted to ask you about For Girls Like You, the ministry and the magazine. Tell us a little bit about it. Wynter started actually, right?

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah. It's a ministry that Wynter started as a mom that was struggling in motherhood who was obedient to the call that God put on her life, which we talked about yesterday. The magazine was an accident that turned into a subscriber-based magazine that's now read by girls all around the world.

Jonathan Pitts: It's funny, I found a journal from a year before she died where she said, "God, thank you For Girls Like You. Thank you for what it's been. But I'm getting weary of the work. Will you show me a path forward? Whether it be dissolving it partnering with another ministry, whatever it is, show me a path forward." Six months later, we would actually hire an editor-in-chief, her name is Roberta, to run the magazine. She would work on three issues with Wynter and then Wynter would suddenly pass away.

Jonathan Pitts: Roberta is still the editor-in-chief of that magazine, and without Roberta there's no way I would carry it on. So God would send his provision. He'd sent his ram coming up the mountain before we'd know we'd need it.

Jonathan Pitts: The day that she died had 1200 subscribers. Now has over 5000 and continues to grow and is a nonprofit that serves not only girls that subscribe, those 5000, but also girls that we give to through partnerships with churches and non-profit organizations, mostly girls that we want to reach that would never be able to afford or find our magazine otherwise in urban pockets and things like that.

Jonathan Pitts: It's been the greatest gift of my life to not only help that ministry carry on, but see it grow, and that Wynter's legacy, the things that we do for Christ will matter beyond our lives. That magazine and her publishing beyond that is a massive legacy to her life and the obedience that she had in God.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan, for all the parents listening right now, grandparents too, why should they get a subscription to For Girls Like You?

Jonathan Pitts: Because every little girl needs to see themselves in another little girl that's doing big things for God. Wynter started the magazine hoping that regular girls would see other regular girls doing big things for God and be inspired to do the same. They can see that in the girls that we feature. The next issue will have Chris Tomlin's girls on the cover of it, but they're just regular girls. They're Chris Tomlin's daughters, but they're regular little girls and they're going to do big things for God. I believe that by faith.

Jonathan Pitts: But ultimately, my girls got to see in their mom this regular girl do big things for God. Now they're aspiring you the same, and we just want every girl to see that come to life in a regular way. Not just the scripture stuff, but scripture supporting regular girls doing awesome things, both in the "church" and outside

of the church. That's why, yeah. It's inspiration for their daughters and granddaughters.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Tell us about Church of the City real quick before you go. I hear it's pretty dynamic

Jonathan Pitts: Yeah, Church of the City, we're three churches in Nashville living in the way of Jesus for the renewal of our city, one church in New York City as well. It's a beautiful expression of the body of Christ, a bunch of people from a bunch of different denominations coming together under the banner of Christ and pushing forward with truth, Bible based, and it's been really beautiful.

Jonathan Pitts: We have partnerships all over our city we call missional partners where we as a church are investing in these other organizations and putting our money where our mouth is to support other great works. We could try to replicate these ministries but they do it better than we do. It's one of the highlights of our ministry, is our partnerships across the city. It's been a beautiful congregation and a family to be a part of, and a story I've been really grateful to join.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jonathan, let's close this way, a word of encouragement to those who are going through a dark season, a time of loss. If they take anything away from the last two days, hear me on this, give them your final thought.

Jonathan Pitts: I would say I read this book by Leighton Ford called The Attentive Life. It's a beautiful book and I would recommend to anybody that's grieving or not grieving to read that book. But it's a beautiful book about paying attention. He says this line about seeing God in all things and all things in God. God is present and a part of every part of our lives if only we opened our eyes to see it.

Jonathan Pitts: So I would say more than anything else, grief is real. Pain is real. Darkness is real. We're going to walk through things in this life. I might walk through things harder than I've walked through already, and ultimately the reality is that God is with me in it and I can actually see it if only I open my eyes, if I choose to see. Dr. Tony Evans says, "If all we see is what we see, we'll never see all there is to be seen." That faith has acting like it is so even when it's not so in order that it might be so simply because God says so.

Jonathan Pitts: So I would say, hold on to faith and look for God in all things. Because he's there if we look hard enough, and he wants to express himself to us. So rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice. Whatever is true, whatever is right, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, whatever is excellent and praiseworthy, think about these things. Look for these things with all that you have, and God will show himself in them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You bet. Jonathan, it's such a delight to have you. What a wonderful conversation. Thanks for the gift of your time and your heart.

Jonathan Pitts: Tim, it's always great talking to you. Thanks for having me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hey, the book again is My Wynter Season: Seeing God's Faithfulness in the Shadow of Grief, everywhere books are sold. You can pick up a copy of that amazing work. On behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife Shirley, the entire team at Family Talk, thank you for joining us.

Roger Marsh: And you've just heard the conclusion of Dr. Tim Clinton's intimate and heartfelt conversation with Jonathan Pitts here on Family Talk. Jonathan is an author, a faith leader, an executive pastor of Church of the City in Franklin, Tennessee. We hope you've been blessed to hear Jonathan share about his personal feelings and his young family's journey since losing his wife Wynter in 2018.

Roger Marsh: In Psalm 147, Verses 1 through 3, "Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him! He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. The Pitts family has been clinging to that promise, and God has been faithful to comfort and help them through their grief. They seem to be thriving, as Jonathan and his four girls, each of them in their own way is doing so.

Roger Marsh: Now to learn more about Jonathon Pitts, Church of the City, his new book, My Wynter Season, or to hear any part of today's or yesterday's broadcast visit our broadcast page at [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). That's [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). I'm Roger Marsh.

Roger Marsh: If you like what you hear, tell a friend, and thanks for supporting the ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. It's because of friends like you that we can bring you content like you just heard. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and God's richest blessings to you and your family.

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