



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Finding Faith and Family Through Foster Care – Part 2

Guest(s): Tori Hope Petersen

Air Date: November 17, 2022

[Listen to the broadcast](#)

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: Welcome to Family Talk, the radio ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and we are so grateful that you chose to make us a part of your day. Remember, Family Talk is only possible because of you. It's because of your prayers, your encouragement and your generosity that we remain on the air and online.

If you are enjoying our program, by all means, please share us with a friend. And if you have a comment or other concern on your heart that you'd like to share with us, remember you can always contact our constituent care team. The number is 877-732-6825. Again, write that down, 877-732-6825.

Well, our guest for today once again is Tori Hope Petersen. We are concluding her conversation with our own Dr. Tim Clinton as she shares with us her inspiring story of how she dealt with the trauma of a rough home life, living with her mom in an abusive relationship as a little girl, being removed from the home and then facing many challenges in the foster care system.

Dr. Tim Clinton, as you may know, is a licensed clinical psychologist and family therapist and he continues his discussion with Tori about her early childhood and how she struggled with the emotional pain as a young adult. If you weren't with us for part one of our conversation, let me tell you a little bit about Tori Hope Petersen.

She was a collegiate track and field champion at Hillsdale College and was named Miss. Universe in 2021. That is truly amazing. Tori married her wonderful husband Jacob in 2018. Together they have two biological children and opened their hearts to adopt another child as well. Tori also founded and operates the ministry called The Beloved Initiative. She's quite an inspiring woman of God. So let's jump back into our conversation right now on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Tori, yesterday the conversation was around a lot of the life journey you were on, and it's stunning to see the level of pain and the darkness that you walked through as a little girl. And what was beautiful are those glimpses of light that we talked about yesterday and how God was really introducing Himself to you and you responded to Him.

But I want to go back to something Tori, as we get started, you talked about in your pattern of life, now I think you were searching for the love of your father, your parents in a lot of outside relationships, and you mentioned that you seem to be attracted to the bad boys.

I have this perspective for a moment, when you grow up in a lot of pain and chaos, confusion and when that's all you know you tend to be attracted to it. In other words, it's like that's the predictable thing in my life. I can figure out how to move in and out of those relationships.

I can't tell you, Tori, how many people have said to me, "Dr. Tim, it seems like I'm always attracted to the bad guys. Why is that?" Did you see that kind of a pattern, Tori? What are your thoughts on it?

Tori Hope Petersen: I completely agree with you. There's actually psychological studies on this that when your parents are alcoholics or your parents are mentally ill, I think it's three or four times more likely to be in a relationship and actually marry someone who has the same struggles that your parents do.

And the hypothesis on those is that it's because it's what we're used to. We're used to the chaos. People who grow up in brokenness are used to the brokenness and it's where they find comfort

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. And breaking those kind of patterns or in some cases those bonds. We talked yesterday a little bit about trauma bonds and how there's this search that's going on and there's some type of toxic mix that's almost pulling me or sucking me into it.

I've often seen families where there's all the good intentions of the world saying, "I want to change my life, I want to change my life."

And then it's easy to go back and say, but "I'm praying that something would change over here, that my mom who's mentally ill would love me, or my dad who has been abusive and hurtful to me or what have you, or these patterns or this past that I've grown up in would be different." And when you're drawn back to it, Tori, it's just never changes, but it's hard to get out of that mess.

Tori Hope Petersen: Oh, yeah. I still have a relationship with my biological mom and I say I have a relationship with her because ultimately I want her to know the love of Jesus. That's the only thing that matters at the end of the day, if we have eternal life or

we don't, and I love my mom and I want her to know that love for her, and I want her to heal by knowing that love.

And we were sitting in the car the other day, it was just an unhealthy, chaotic, hard conversation. And I keep going back and I'm like, it's because I love her, but I have to step away after the patterns just keep cycling through.

Because I'm like, when it happens to me it hurt people, and I say that all the time, but I believe that healed people help heal people. And if we let people keep hurting us, then we're not going to be healed people that are able to help heal others.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Tori, as you were talking, my mind was going to the word memories. You talk in your book about triggers and being triggered at times, the memory piece here is a real difficult piece. They're some, they really wall off everything because they had to. The source of their comfort was the source of their pain.

When you're being abused or hurt by someone who's supposed to love you as a kid, it's like your brain becomes like scrambled eggs. It doesn't make any sense. You can't absorb it. And so you become the fly on the wall or something over there. You talk about fight, flight and you mentioned the word fawn in the book. Do you mind explaining some of that and how that manifested in your life?

Tori Hope Petersen: You know, my mom valued working hard, being poised, being polite. She always said that I needed to be a lady, I needed to act like a lady. And that came in forms of putting my napkin on my lap, crossing my legs. My mom was very old school in a lot of ways and some of those things were good in raising me, but I learned early on that I could do things that made my mom proud, that maybe made the mania and the anger, the outbursts less.

My mom was diagnosed with bipolar and schizophrenia. I think I was 12 or 13 when the diagnosis came across the table that made her get on disability. And I began to understand that the blow ups, the moments of volatility, were just unpredictable. You never knew when they were going to happen. And so I think I was always living in a way where I could try and control or prevent the outbursts because they were so scary.

And then when I went into the foster care system, again, moving from home to home to home, it's like, how can I just apologize, have people pleasing behaviors, say that everything is my fault so that we can have a good relationship and move on even when things weren't my fault, so that I could please the people and feel loved in that moment.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That is very difficult to process and to undo because those patterns then, again, remove the strength of your own identity, your own voice, because you're always living for the applause of others. It's about what you do and what others think of you.

And so when you're caught up in that pattern, you can never be enough. And it's hard, by the way, for people to love you too because they can never love you enough because you never are enough. That pattern then begins to impact how we do or how we don't do relationships. Even with God, it's like just accepting unconditionally that He loves me, it's a hard thing then to embrace, right?

Tori Hope Petersen: Oh, yeah. So why, I actually, proud that Mrs. Universe thing came about. I was in a season where we were fostering a sibling group of three, our adoption for our son was coming up. We also have two biological children. We were serving in our community in a lot of ways. I was speaking and writing, just handed in my book. It was just a very full season.

And I was like, God, I'm doing this for you. This is for you. I'm going to live a life for you. And I was in prayer and I just, like I heard it so clearly. God was like, "Can you just be with me? Can you just do this with me instead of for me? You're not going to be some varsity Christian. This is not the track team. Just be with me."

And I was honestly like, I don't know how to be with God. Life has always been living for the glory of God. That's how it's kind of always been framed in my mind. And to do that, it has always felt kind of this earned attachment, but God was like, just be with me. And I was like, even though there was track, it could have felt earned. A lot of it was fun.

It was this time in my life where I got to be with God and learn my gifts and my talents and where he was glorified through it, but it didn't feel like this work for him. And so I was like, someone presented to me the opportunity in Mrs. Universe in a pageantry. And I was like, "That's so superficial. I would never do that."

And then at the end of the day I was like, "Man, that actually sounds really fun." And maybe this is the key to being with God, to just having fun with Him and of course letting Him be glorified, but not like working for Him. And it really was the season of having fun and doing something totally different than what I normally did. And I think that God really blessed that obedience.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I want to make sure people understand this in context. What you're referencing is as you came through high school and you "fostered out," if you will, you were mentored by Scott Wickman who was your track coach. And eventually, is this right, he adopted you when you aged out, is that right? And this became a world where you were able to run and you found a life in this and you became really good. You went on to Hillsdale College, became an All-American. It's an incredible story. But you're still running, you're performing, you're doing something.

And this is the piece of learning, the significance of what it means to be just in relationship. It's not about performing, but at the same time enjoying or

embracing all this. Tie the bow for us here and how this began to give you life, Tori, and began to unfold beautifully.

And eventually there at Hillsdale College, you met somebody who you fell in love with. There's a whole nother piece there, but God continues to unfold this story, this narrative, and He's at work in your life. And if you could just see him, and you were seeing Him even in the midst of the brokenness.

Tori Hope Petersen: Yeah. I was praying every night and I was like, "God, if you just let me win the state track meet, I'm going to glorify you." Like you can make a deal with God. And I didn't even know who God was, that's just what I was saying. And my track coach was like, "I know you can do this. I know you can accomplish this."

And no one had really said anything like that to me before. I would say my town, outside of the church, there was a lot of talk of just like, "She's going to be another statistic, she's going to be a lot like her mom, going to fall into the stereotypes." And that was really hard for me to hear.

And there were definitely times where I was like, "Yup, might as well give it up. That's all that it's ever going to be." And my track coach just kept encouraging me, mentoring me. And that year I became a five time state champion in track and field. And really, he became my best friend and it was like, oh wow, I have someone finally for the first time. And it was a healthy relationship. He was a healthy person. And I think during that, just patterns in my brain were reformed and I realized that what he said was true, that I could do big things.

And that statistics and stereotypes, they weren't the dictator. God was the dictator, if I just trusted Him and believed in what the people around me said when they were speaking words of life over me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Tori, the experience there was so life giving. I wanted to go back, people probably don't even know this. We're talking about an All-American track star who, and make sure I get this right, Tori, the first time you went to track practice or got some shoes, your mom bought them three or four sizes bigger because she didn't want you to grow out of them or something.

So here you are and you ran your first track practice in your bare feet or in your socks. Isn't that right?

Tori Hope Petersen: Yes. Yes, I did. Yeah. You know, we couldn't afford much. And actually I started off as a cheerleader, but the sport was too expensive with all the uniforms and the bows and the traveling. And so I started doing track instead because it was just cheaper.

All you really need is a good pair of shoes. Well, that's what we thought. And then I went to practice, my mom bought these shoes. I wear a size seven now. They were a size 11. They were so big. And she's like, "I don't want you to grow

out them. I need these to fit you all throughout high school," which is so funny to think of.

And they were bright yellow. So that's literally what it looked like. Exactly what it looked like. And then my first track practice, so my mom bought me spikes and we asked the person at the store like, "Where are track shoes?" He directed us towards the spikes.

And then I went to practice wearing my spikes and my coach was like, "Do you have any other shoes?" And I was like, "No, these are my track shoes." And he was like, "Yeah, we only wear those during special practices and during meets." And I didn't realize that there were running shoes and then there are spikes, which are special shoes.

And so my first track practice was done barefoot. My first meet, I handed off a baton in the wrong lane, I false started like seriously, the most unlikely person to be a state champion and be an All-American.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It was how you tell the story in your book *Fostered*, it's just fun and it's like we're right there with you. Tori, let's go to the foster care system for a moment. You were in and out a couple of times and then wound up kind of bouncing all over the place. How many times, or how many different homes were you in as a girl?

Tori Hope Petersen: From the home that I was in from when I entered the first time to when I emancipated, believe it was 12.

Dr. Tim Clinton: 12 different homes. Having to adjust every time to a unique family situation. Tori, it's become a platform of yours. You are into foster care system reform. And what are some of the most pressing issues that need reform? Do you mind sharing some of those with us?

Tori Hope Petersen: Yeah, there are so many. The first one is that case workers have way too much work. They have a conflict of interest with having to keep a certain amount of homes, recruiting a certain amount of foster parents and homes within their county or area.

But at the same time, abuse happening in homes or needing to do adequate background checks, but also feeling the pressure of keeping those numbers. It's a contradiction of what is in the best interest of the child oftentimes. And then the other just crucial reform that I would love to see is it revolves around the case file.

So every foster youth has a case file that follows them everywhere they go and it talks about the worst things that have ever happened to them and the worst things they've ever done, all their behaviors, if they have any mental struggles.

And it absolutely is helpful because as a foster parent, as a counselor, we have to help youth through their trauma.

And it's good to have some kind of knowledge base when doing that, but at the same time, the things that are in these case files can often be dramatized. Sometimes they are things that actually didn't happen. And so there needs to be some kind of accountability between case worker and supervisor or case worker and caseworker, case worker and CASA, which is a court appointed special advocate and what is put in the child's case file.

And I think as a child gets older even they should have a say of what is said in the case file. Because when that case file is given to prospective parents, it so often turns parents away, prospective adoptive parents. And that's why so many older kids are remaining in the foster care system not being adopted even though they've been waiting for years.

It's because what the file says is scary. But so many times when you meet this kid, of course they have behaviors, of course they have trauma, but so many times it does not reflect what the file says.

Dr. Tim Clinton: In a lot of ways too, they're going to push every button they can to prove that you as a foster care parent are just like every other adult in their life that you really don't care about me. And so if you're called to that ministry, it is extraordinary work.

And again, we're not trying to do a beat up on foster care. What we're trying to say is, let's be honest about some of the patterns that's happening there. You made a statement that sometimes the cycle of abuse often continues. You experienced it Tori, you saw it, you witnessed that it was a part of your life. You and your sister Allison, you even got split up, didn't you?

Tori Hope Petersen: Yeah, after our very first foster home together. So that was when we re-entered, when I was an adolescent, we were split up and that was so heartbreaking because-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. You were reporting trying to deal with some tough issues and nobody believed you, right?

Tori Hope Petersen: Yeah. So I reported abuse that she had come and told me about and they just said, "This is a lie." The investigation was never done. I talked to one of my caseworkers a couple months ago, I was like, "Whatever happened with this?" And she was like, "Oh, I pushed for the investigation for so long and they wouldn't do it."

But I think maybe they eventually did because of her kind of pressing. But even in the beginning there was actually no investigation of the abuse, which was

devastating because my sister actually stayed there for a little bit longer. And then I went to go live in a residential treatment center.

And honestly when I went to that residential treatment center, I was so upset. I was like, "I do not belong here." But you were talking about how people become flies on the wall and even though I did not meet the criteria to be at this RTC, I'm so grateful that I ended up there because it allowed me not to be a fly on the wall.

I had to go to counseling every other day. So it was like four to five times a week and it was very intense, but I learned how to process my emotions at such a young age and I don't think that's given to a lot of kids who experience trauma. And then moving forward, the judge had mandated counseling. So that really started with the residential treatment center.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I saw where you said one in seven live in those, what you call, our modern day orphanages, really group homes or what have you. And that 40% of foster teens live with no clinical reason for being there. And then what happens, Tori, to them when they're done? Where do they go? What do they do?

Tori Hope Petersen: The hope of residential treatment centers or group homes is always that it's temporary and residential treatment centers stay that what they're doing is they are rehabilitating children so that they can live in a family setting.

And while I think sometimes that is very true and it is good that we do need that, group homes should only be used for acute traumatic experiences. But oftentimes residential treatment center, we say that their last resort, but they're not always.

And so that's when they become very damaging because we're putting, like God has created us to be in family, to be in relationship and residential treatment centers really don't allow for that. And right we know, we've talked about it here. What is healing is being in relationship, especially for children who have had such broken relationships.

And so that's why residential treatment facilities are just tricky in what they offer, but the hope is that they go to a family setting and that they are adopted.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. I'm thinking of the words of Jesus, "Suffer the children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." The Lord's heart is toward those, especially those young hearts who don't have advocates, who need people to step up and into their lives.

You are a champion of what you call as radical hospitality, and you're calling the church to do that very thing. What James said, that to not forget the widows and the orphans in their affliction and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. To step up and to be a part of the solution here.

There's a love story here. You fell in love, you wound up you're very pro-life, you were pregnant out of wedlock, but you are the mom of two. You have the love of your life and you are also a foster mom. Isn't that right, Tori?

Tori Hope Petersen: Yes. My husband and I just moved to Ohio and so we are in the process of being re-certified because we were living in Minnesota. And when you move from state to state, you have to go through all the training again.

So that's where we are right now. But yes, I'm married to Jacob. We've been married for over four years and I met him at Hillsdale College, our senior year, and then we got married a week after college graduation.

Dr. Tim Clinton: How beautiful. Tori, we are fighting the clock. Your new book *Fostered: One Woman's Powerful Story of Finding Faith and Family through Foster Care* is so moving, so powerful. I want people to know that November is National Adoption Month, May is Foster Care Adoption Month, those issues and more, the pro-life.

By the way, you're also pro-law enforcement because you believe they step in and help rescue kids who are abused in situations like this and you know how difficult it is. You know the horror, the trauma of all of it. Close us out, Tori, you get the final words. Speak to your audience out there and tell them what is at the core of all this. If you listen to both days broadcasting, you can only take home with you one thought. Tori, what is it?

Tori Hope Petersen: You can take home one thought, it would be to become a professional lover of people, to let people in radically and listen to God and how He wants you to do that. There's not only one way, it's not only foster care. Use the gifts that God has given you and become a professional lover of people.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I've always believed this, that God has no greater plan than to use people through which He channels His message of hope and strength and encouragement into the lives of other people. That's what God wants us to do. I want to close with Psalm 40:2.

I think this is a very appropriate verse, especially as we reflect on your life, Tori. "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; and he has set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand." Tori, we want to encourage you to stand strong.

What a powerful story of the grace of God. On behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the entire Family Talk team and more, we pray God will continue to lead you and use you in a muddy way as you stand strong to foster care reform. Thank you for joining us.

Tori Hope Petersen: Thank you for having me.

Roger Marsh:

Well, the story of Tori Hope Petersen is a true example of how God can work through struggles and pain. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. We just concluded part two of Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with Tori.

If you miss part one or any part of today's program, remember the entire conversation, part one and two combined, are available online in our broadcast center at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Well, we certainly hope that you enjoyed today's program and we would love to get your feedback on it.

Please reach out to our customer care team at 877-732-6825. You can make a comment about the program. You can share a prayer request. We'll be happy to pray with and for you. You can even make a donation to support our ministry if you'd like. Again, that toll free number to call is 877-732-6825.

And by the way, all donations made to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute are completely tax deductible. And if you prefer to send your donation through the U.S. Mail, our ministry mailing address is The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip code, 80949.

Well, we hope that God has touched your heart through today's powerful message and we hope you have a wonderful weekend, be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Till then, I'm Roger Marsh. Have a blessed day.

Announcer:

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