



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Living Through the Loss of a Spouse – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Dee Brestin

**Air Date:** March 20, 2023

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**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.

**Roger Marsh:** Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Sobering Statistic to start off this broadcast week. There are currently 11 million women in the United States today who have been widowed, and when you add in the guise, the total rises to 15 million widows and widowers. Now, here's another eye-opening statistic. 75% of American women will become widowed during their lifetimes. Now, you probably know someone whose life has been touched by the loss of a spouse. Maybe that loss is even your own. Mothers, sisters, friends, aunts, daughters. It's so important for all of us to take time to understand what these women are going through and to be willing to provide them with the prayers, emotional support, love and care that they need during this time of loss. And also to remind the person who has stepped into this tender season that God is close to them to comfort and heal their hearts. I think of the words of Psalm 147:3 so appropriate for someone who has lost a spouse. "God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."

Our guest today here on Family Talk is Dee Brestin. She is a dear friend of Dr. James Dobson and a fan favorite of our program. Dee is a speaker and author of the bestselling books, *The Friendships of Women*, and *Falling in Love with Jesus*. Dee has also written over 20 Bible studies, including *Proverbs and Parables*, and speaks at many large women's conferences throughout the year. Dee is a widow herself, having lost her husband, Steve, to cancer, but she remains thankful for the love that they shared and their five children and many grandchildren who all love the Lord as well. Now, before we get into today's conversation, we're going to listen to a clip with Dee from a previous interview with Dr. Dobson. She was discussing the story of Naomi in Scripture and how she handled her season of widowhood. Keep in mind this clip was recorded before Dee lost her husband, Steve, to cancer. Let's listen in right now.

**Dr. James Dobson:** Dee, is it your observation that many women come into marriage expecting all of their needs for intimacy to be met in that marital relationship and are typically disappointed when that does not occur?

Dee Brestin: Yes. I think the scriptural example we have of that is Naomi. She expected that all her needs would be met through her husband and her sons, and when they died, she was devastated and bitter and angry at God. And I believe God wanted to minister her at that time through her two daughters-in-law or Orpah and Ruth, but all she could think was, "I need my husband back."

Roger Marsh: Dee Brestin may not have fully understood the depth of pain that Naomi was experiencing at that time. However, in today's classic episode, we'll listen to her as she shares about how to carry on after the loss of a spouse. This interview was recorded with her own Dr. Dobson and Dee Brestin, almost two years after she lost her husband, Steve, to colon cancer back in 2004. Let's join them right now, right here, on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Dee is a wonderful lady and she wrote a book called The Friendships of Women that sold more than a million copies, and she's spoken on that subject. Dee, do you still speak, you told me, 30 times a year or so.

Dee Brestin: I do, and I'm really thankful for my ministry. It's a reason to get up in the morning.

Dr. James Dobson: And now you have a Bible study on The Friendships of Women.

Dee Brestin: Yes. It's an in depth Bible study on The Friendships of Women that has just come out. I have learned so much even listening to that opening clip you played on how I said Naomi was bitter and angry. Well, that was before I had had a catastrophic loss.

Dr. James Dobson: You can't change your mind about that.

Dee Brestin: You know What? I'm a whole lot more sympathetic with Naomi now. I know one of the things, she said all those things and she said, "I'm empty and God has dealt severely with me when she was returning to Bethlehem and after we buried my husband, we buried him near our cabin in Wisconsin." I came back to Nebraska and as I was coming down the driveway, he didn't come out to meet me.

Dr. James Dobson: And he always would.

Dee Brestin: And he always would.

Dr. James Dobson: He was often in the garden, wasn't it?

Dee Brestin: That's right. That's right. And I went into the house and it was so empty. And I went up into the bedroom and there's that huge bed and I knew I was going to have to sleep alone in it. And we used to call each other codependent insomniacs and we would talk in the night and laugh and pray, and then he tried to get me to sleep by saying, "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod sailed out on a

moonlight night," and he wasn't going to be there. And I thought that's what Naomi felt. She saw all those places that she'd shared with her husband and her sons. She lost her sons too. No wonder she was thrashing out and bitter and angry. And I'm a little more sympathetic.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we heard some long ago recordings of my mother after my dad died, and I remember one of the things she said is that my house has lost its soul.

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: You understand that?

Dee Brestin: I do understand that.

Dr. James Dobson: And they were such good friends and it was so very, very painful for her, painful for their little dog, they had a little terrier named Benjie who just worshiped my dad. He was usually in his lap when my dad was reading a book and I went there to Olathe, Kansas to pack up my dad's stuff, his clothes and things after he had died and I was putting his suits in the suitcase and packing things up and Benjie, the little dog, jumped up on a bed where the suitcase was and he walked over to that suitcase and climbed into it and sniffed all around and then curled up there and went to sleep on my dad's coat. People who have not been through that kind of loss just think they understand it, but probably don't.

Dee Brestin: Our youngest daughter said to me, "Mom, I don't really like being around people who haven't suffered." And I think that is often true. People who have suffered especially a catastrophic loss, and I define that as something that changes your whole identity because you lose a spouse or a divorce can do that or losing a child. You have a knife in your heart that most people can't see. And here I am 21 months now out from Steve's death and that knife is still in my heart. When Simeon said to Mary, "A sword will pierce your soul about the loss of Jesus." People who have suffered a catastrophic loss, they see that knife and they are more likely to mourn with me than those who have not. They're more likely to be quiet and just be there because offering solutions or pointing out the silver lining to my pain, that's one of the things that I hate-

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, it doesn't help at all.

Dee Brestin: ...the most. You don't say the things you think they'll say, "Well, it's so good you had a good man." And I think, "Yes, I sure miss him." Or, "It's good you had him this long and I think longer would be better and it's good he wasn't suffering anymore." And that's true, but he suffered so much. And when you point out the silver lining, it's like minimizing your pain though I know they mean.

Dr. James Dobson: It's really up to you to talk about the silver lining. It's not up to somebody who isn't going through it.

Dee Brestin: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: Again, going back to my mother, pardon the personal references here, but you mentioned identity. Her entire identity was in and through my dad. She wanted it that way. He was the person to whom she had grafted her soul early on. And she said when he died, she was no longer Mrs. James Dobson. She was Myrtle Dobson and she didn't want to be Myrtle Dobson. She wanted to be Mrs. James Dobson. Her right driver's license was changed. It was no longer Mrs. James Dobson. Her social security-

Dee Brestin: I understand.

Dr. James Dobson: ...all of that was gone and she had to rebuild from scratch. And frankly, she never got it done. She couldn't cope with it.

Dee Brestin: Right. And it's difficult because in marriage you become one. The key I think, and I think God really prepared me so long ago because He is so good for the loss of Steve at a young age. When I wrote the original Friendships of Women, I was talking about dependency because women tend to be dependent in relationships. Two little girls play well together, but three little girls don't. And I was watching our then eight year old Sally, and she and her best friend, they were almost anxious when they were apart and they'd borrow each other's clothes and even toothbrushes. And so, I was getting concerned and I said to them, I said, "Do you think you two are dependent on each other?" And they said, "Well, what does dependent mean?" And I was searching for a simple synonym. I said, "Well, do you think you need each other?" And they said, "Yes, we need each other."

Dr. James Dobson: And it's a good thing-

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: ...not a bad thing.

Dee Brestin: And then Sally said, "Well, is that bad?" And I have this in the original Friendships, I said, "Well, we should cherish our friends, but the only one that we should depend on-

Dr. James Dobson: Is the Lord.

Dee Brestin: ...is Jesus, because He's the only one who will never betray us, never move away and never die. But even as I said that I thought, if anything happens to Steve, I hope a total care nursing home will take this 40- year old woman and her children. And I do think it's a challenge, but in a marriage, if you can help each other find strength in God, you are doing each other such a favor.

Dr. James Dobson: There's the stability, isn't it?

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And you've needed a lot of that assistance, Dee. In the last four years you've said goodbye not only to Steve, your husband, who was a physician.

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: But also to your mother and your father.

Dee Brestin: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: The impermanence of relationships in this all too quick and passing world makes it very difficult when that occurs.

Dee Brestin: Right. We are a vapor. I had some regrets and I think it's very common, and I know many of the listeners who've lost somebody have regrets. Wish I'd done this, wish I'd said this. But I think one of the things that I have done is I have let those regrets lead me into repentance. Steve wanted me to keep speaking. We thought he had four years, he had 14 months. I wish I hadn't spoken at all. I wish I'd stayed with him the whole time.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, that tell us about the good man that you were married to.

Dee Brestin: He was an orthopedic surgeon and just a wonderful, wonderful husband, father, and doctor.

Dr. James Dobson: How many years were you married?

Dee Brestin: 39. We married young, thank God.

Dr. James Dobson: What an early start.

Dee Brestin: An early start.

Dr. James Dobson: And he had cancer.

Dee Brestin: He had a colon cancer. Fourth stage colon cancer was the diagnosis. And the funeral was such an amazing thing. I mean, we had to go to the biggest church in town and still not everybody could sit down. And the children, all five of them stood up and talked about their dad. And each one of them shared a different aspect. And so many men left that day saying, "I've got to be a better dad." Because our daughter, Sally said, "Every time I came into the room, he'd put down whatever he was doing and say, 'What's on your mind honey?'" And he laughed with the kids. Our daughter, Beth, who we adopted when she was 12, said, "I liked it when mom went away speaking because we'd have father-daughter weekends and we'd do whatever I wanted to do. He was full of the love of Jesus.

Dr. James Dobson: You wrote too that the deathbed and your determination to be there with him was a very special time. Why was that special to you?

Dee Brestin: One of the things that I have learned is that parting scenes are important. In Scripture, God zooms His camera in on parting scenes. It seems like things that have been held back come to the surface. And when you're a Christian, you don't know whether they're dying or not because you know God can heal. And so, it wasn't until they said 90% of his liver is covered with cancer that we began to think, yes, he's really going to die. And all five children were there and he called each one in like Jacob to say goodbye.

Dr. James Dobson: To bless them?

Dee Brestin: To bless them, to tell them why he was proud of them. Our youngest daughter, Annie, stood up at the funeral and I expected the older children to be articulate than they were, but she blew people away. She said, "I would challenge you to be thankful because my dad was such a thankful man. Every night at dinner, he would push back his chair and say, "That's the best meatloaf I ever had." And she said he didn't need the new thing. He liked what he had because it worked. And she talked about how she crawled up on the bed and he held her and he said, "Annie, I am so glad I got to be your daddy, and I'm so sorry that I have to leave you." But he said, "I will always be your daddy because death hides, but it doesn't divide."

Dr. James Dobson: I must say right here that their fathers who are listening to us right now who are pouring every last drop of energy into being a big man into family business or making money or becoming important, and they've got little kids around them and they're not aware that that moment is coming for all of us. Why not live now like you will hope you had lived when that moment comes for you and when your children are gathered around. There's nothing more important in life than that. I wish we could get ahold of that when we're young because the years go by so quickly. So, he died in, I believe October of 2004.

Dee Brestin: October 16th, 2004.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dee Brestin: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. What have these two years been like, Dee?

Dee Brestin: The first year was very hard and I felt frozen. I thought that when we got to the anniversary of the second year, it would be better. But the beginning of the second year was harder because the shock was gone. And then I realized he's really not coming back. And one of the things I've appreciated is there were some friends who wrote me on the anniversary of his death that they were still hurting with me, that they still cared. That meant so much. I feel that I am, as

you said, getting my legs under me. This summer has been a healing summer. I do see how God has prepared me. I did this trilogy with Kathy Troccoli on approaching Jesus as our Bridegroom, never dreaming I would need it so dramatically. And I'm learning how to let Jesus be my husband. I'm still learning.

But He does promise that He will be a husband to the widow and a father to the fatherless. And I can't tell you how frequently I pray that prayer. I was coming home from the airport one day and all the lights on my dashboard started flashing. And I said, "Okay, Lord, you said you'd be a husband to the widow and I need a husband right now." And then I remembered that as he was dying, Steve called and got OnStar into my car. And I'd never touched it before, but I touched it. And this voice came out of the heavens and said, "Mrs. Brestin, are you in trouble?" And I said, "I am." And they said, "Are you going home?" I said, "I'm trying." And they said, "Well, you have 112 miles to go, just a minute." They said, "It's a problem with your brakes, but it's not serious. You'll be fine." "Thank you."

Dr. James Dobson: Steve had provided that for you.

Dee Brestin: Steve had provided that.

Dr. James Dobson: He knew you would need it.

Dee Brestin: He knew I would need that. And approaching Jesus as my husband is so important. There's times where you feel sorrow and joy at the same time. Does that sound crazy?

Dr. James Dobson: Nope.

Dee Brestin: Like I've watched my grandchildren skip stones into this path of the sunset, and it was a joyous moment, but oh, I wish Steve could have been there to share it with me, but I had the thought, but Jesus is here with me and He is happy that I'm enjoying what He's created.

Dr. James Dobson: And you're going to see him again.

Dee Brestin: I am definitely going to see him again.

Dr. James Dobson: Dee, when you think back on your early days of marriage, are those memories precious to you now? Do you want to forget that because it's so painful, or do you go back and experience it and live through it again?

Dee Brestin: Oh, memories are a great comfort. And one of the things that I love when friends will remember things too.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. That's something I want to ask you because the natural tendency when you're with somebody who is grieving is to go nowhere near the grief. And so,

you avoid all that. And I remember my mother again saying that, "His memory's what I think about all day long. It's what I want to talk about. It's what I care about, but my friends are afraid to talk to me about that."

Dee Brestin: Yes. I think they must think that I've forgotten, though I haven't. I think about him about every minute. And so, I love it when they bring up his name or remember something he did. And the letters that ministered the most to me were those that remembered things he did because there were so many things he did I didn't know too, as a doctor. House calls or not charging a patient or something like that. And they'd write and they'd tell me. And I thought, I'm not surprised. And when they still talk about them, it means so much. So, don't stop talking. And I think also there are those listening out there that have the multiplied burden of grief and shame. It's easier to lose a husband to cancer than to suicide, I think.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes. And there are people listening to us right now who've been through that.

Dee Brestin: Yes. And or other things even, I remember going out to a woman whose son had just been given a prison sentence, and I said, "I hear you're going through a hard time." She said, "Oh, Dee, nobody's ever said anything to me." And just to let them know you care.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. You don't have to have answers.

Dee Brestin: You don't have to have answers for sure. But just let them know-

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, there are no answers.

Dee Brestin: ...there are no answers. Have you heard of the Jewish tradition of sitting Shiva?

Dr. James Dobson: That is what Jacob's friends did.

Dee Brestin: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: Only they didn't do it right.

Dee Brestin: Well, the first seven days they had it right. They didn't say anything. They just saw how greatly he was suffering and they mourned with him, but then they blew it.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Then they began trying to had straighten it all out.

Dee Brestin: Then they told him why he was suffering and they were wrong. But the first seven days they did it right. And I love that concept of just, I think about when Steve was diagnosed, he was in the hospital and my friend Norma came in and she put his hand on his heart and the tears just welled up in her eyes and she didn't say anything. That ministered.



Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Dee, I've never hated to end a broadcast so much in all these years, I think. But our time is gone. I want to pick up right here next time.

Dee Brestin: Okay.

Dr. James Dobson: And have you share some more of what helped and what hurt.

Dee Brestin: Okay.

Dr. James Dobson: And how we can be of help to others, and especially how can those who are going through the grief that you've gone through get a handle on it and begin to live again. And I have a lot to say. Let's pick it up next time.

Dee Brestin: Sounds good.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a truly tender and heartfelt conversation today here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh inviting you to join us again tomorrow for part two of this discussion featuring Dee Brestin and our own Dr. James Dobson. Loss is challenging for everyone and it's especially difficult when you lose your spouse. Now, of course, death is an inevitable part of life here on Earth, and yet we could all take comfort in knowing that there is eternal life for all of us with Jesus Christ in heaven. And won't it be wonderful to be reunited there. Now, here at the Dobson Institute, we want you to know that while we all handle grief in our own ways, you don't have to go through grief alone. If you or someone needs help dealing with the loss of a loved one, we are here to listen to you and to pray with it for you. Our trained customer care team is standing by 24 hours a day. Just give us a call at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

As we've talked a lot about loss today, we know that pain usually follows the death of a loved one. But remember, when Jesus Christ died on the cross, He brought us life and our salvation. That's the ultimate gift from God, and it's a reason to praise and be joyful. And what better time to share that message with a neighbor this Easter season than by giving them a Life Basket. Now, a Life Basket is a way to bless one of your neighbors with a beautiful basket of treats and goodies. It introduces them to Jesus Christ and invites them to enjoy the loving Christian community at your local church on Easter. Life Baskets are also a fun activity you can do with the entire family or do it with your friends.

If you'd like more information about Life Baskets, just call us at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825 or visit [lifebaskets.org](http://lifebaskets.org). If you're writing that down again, it's the word life and the word baskets.org. We all want to know what's going on in the world and a great way to stay connected and to expand your knowledge of national political issues is by listening to the Defending Faith, Family and Freedom podcast featuring Gary Bauer. It's a new podcast from the Dr. Dobson Policy Center. Gary Bauer is senior vice president of public policy. Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, he shares his unique perspective on current public policies through the lens of the US Constitution and with an unapologetic

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Announcer:

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