



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Life-Changing Fiction

**Guest(s):** Karen Kingsbury

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**Dr. 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:** Well, hello, everyone. Welcome to Family Talk, the listener-supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Thank you so much for making us a part of your life today and every day, as a matter of fact. Now we have a special guest for today's broadcast. She is New York Times bestselling author, Karen Kingsbury. With more than 25 million copies of her award-winning books in print, Karen is one of America's favorite, inspirational storytellers. In fact, her last dozen titles have all topped the bestseller lists and for good reason. When God puts a story on Karen's heart, she does write life-changing fiction.

On today's program, you're going to hear our own Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with Karen Kingsbury. The two will discuss her current projects, also, where she gets her ideas for her stories, and the importance of family. Now what you're about to hear was recorded backstage at the Extraordinary Women's event in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that happened recently. The crowd was filling in and the band was doing a sound check, but Dr. Clinton wanted to talk with Karen before she took the stage. You'll definitely feel the excitement and the ambience behind us. Let's go there now.

**Dr. Clinton:** Karen, it's great to see you. It's great to have you here at the Extraordinary Women conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I know we're backstage. There's so much happening around us, a lot of people out on stage, and a lot of commotion going on. It's really a lot of excitement. There's energy about just coming together that's stunning to me. Can you take us back, I guess, and start us out? When did you feel called or when did you know that God had given you a unique gift? Did somebody validate it in your life, or what had?

**Karen Kingsbury:** Well, for me, it was always my dad who did that. I started writing when I was five.

**Dr. Clinton:** Really?

Karen Kingsbury: I wrote my first book called The Horse. No idea, horses bite me, so I really don't know what that was about. Horse was spelled wrong. Almost every other word was spelled wrong. It was like, I could staple pages together. I could write a story, all the words slanted one way down the page, color some pictures, and I had a book. It was like I caught the bug at that point. I want to write books. I want to put books together.

I did that with short stories through my middle school and high school years. My dad would read those. He would just get tears in his eyes, and he would say, "Karen, wow. Somebody has to be the next bestselling author. I think it's going to be you. One day, everyone is going to know your work." It was just the validation after validation like that. My mom would tell me, "Hey, go clean your room enough." We needed both sides. My dad definitely did.

Dr. Clinton: Your dad. Karen, you talk about your work being, well, at least you're writing, life-changing fiction. Tell us what that means, how important that is to you.

Karen Kingsbury: Well, when I started writing novels, I wanted them to be stories that made people feel. I'm really an evangelist. I mean, at the end of the day, I became a believer when I was in my early 20s. I mean, it was everything to me, and it still is. My husband and I talk about... Now we have some grandchildren and just how we don't want to go out with a fizzle. We want to go out on fire the way we started. As an evangelist writing stories, I have to be very careful to show you the message of salvation and make you hungry for it through storytelling. I always say, Jesus... When He wanted to tell you straight, He told you straight. When He wanted to make a point, He might turn over a table, but when He wanted to touch your heart, He told a story.

Dr. Clinton: He told a story. Karen, when you write... You and I have had this conversation before. You say, "Tim, I'm so involved in that moment, in those words on that paper, that I feel it." I mean, there are moments when you're writing, you actually cry. You're in that scene. Take us there. What's it like for you as you begin to just bring to life on paper what you're seeing before your eyes, really?

Karen Kingsbury: It is crazy, and it is all God. I mean, there's no way I could make that happen. It just happens. The story comes on my heart, and I can't get rid of it. Then I go to paper, and I try to write down some basic thoughts. I write down an outline. I can remember one time. An anecdote would be, I was on a flight. It was a night flight. I'm between two business guys. They're just minding their own business. We never spoke. I'm outlining a book that I wrote back in the day called Unlocked. It's a very emotional book about a teenage autistic boy who finds a friend who actually is paying attention to him. In the process of turning himself over to some musical theater, he actually becomes unlocked out of his non-communicative state.

It's this very emotional story about this teenage boy. I am outlining it. I am telling you, Tim, tears are streaming down my face. I know that the men on either side were so uncomfortable. What is wrong with her? What is she doing?

I probably filled a notebook. I looked like I had a bionic can. Just, I outlined every single bit of that book on that flight. I'm in the moment. I can feel it. I'm in it. I see it. It's the same way when I go to write. Just, I'm laughing or I'm thinking, "Wow, that was really good," but it's not like I'm complimenting myself because it's only the Lord. It's like a movie in my heart, and I'm the first reader.

Dr. Clinton: I was talking to some people about that very type of thing. They referenced the movie, *The Man Who Invented Christmas*, and the actor who was playing Charles Dickens. He was interviewing or interacting with the characters in the room while he was-

Karen Kingsbury: One of my favorite scenes in film, I'm telling you. It's so true. It's just so real. That was very well done.

Dr. Clinton: That's kind of like what you're talking about here.

Karen Kingsbury: Yes. I mean, I have a book coming out called *A Distant Shore*. When I finished that book, I literally felt like I don't want to leave this scene. I'm in Belize. I'm on the beach. These two people have been through so much. I just didn't want to leave their world. It's a crazy thing to feel that connected, but there's no question that the characters are real at that point.

Dr. Clinton: Karen, life-changing fiction... You're missional. You're not just telling a story. You're taking people to a destination place. Like you said, you didn't want to leave there. Karen, when you speak at *Extraordinary Women*, you tell a story, *Let Me Hold You Longer*. In that story, it literally train wrecks the audience because it's moment for you. Here's a little piece of what Karen does in this kind of a moment.

Karen Kingsbury: Now you can take the hand of someone you came with, and then you can wipe your tears with the other hands. Long ago, you came to me a miracle of firsts for smiles, and teeth, and baby steps, a sunbeam on the burst, but one day you will move away and leave to me your past. I will be left thinking of a lifetime of your lasts: the last time that I held a bottle to your baby lips, the last time that I lifted you and held you on my hip, the last night when you woke up crying, needing to be walked, when last you crawled up with your blanket, wanting to be rocked, the last time when you ran to me, still small enough to hold, the last time that you said you'd marry me when you grew old.

Precious, simple moments and bright flashes from your past. Would I have held on longer if I'd known they were your last? Our last adventure to the park, your final midday nap, the last time when you wore your favorite faded baseball cap. Your last few hours of kindergarten, last days of first grade, your last at bat in Little League, last color picture made. I never said goodbye to all your yesterday's long past. What about tomorrow? Will I recognize your last?

The last time that you catch a frog in that old backyard pond, the last time when you run barefoot across that fresh-cut lawn, silly scattered images will represent your past... I keep on taking pictures, never quite sure of your last. The last time that I comb your hair or stop a pillow fight, the last time that I pray with you and tuck you in at night, the last time that we cuddle with a book, just me and you, the last time you jump in our bed and sleep between us two, last piano lesson, last vacation to the lake... You all are going to make me cry now. Come on.

Your last few weeks of middle school, last soccer goal you make... I look ahead and dream of days that haven't come to pass, but as I do, I sometimes miss today's sweet, precious last. The last time that I help you with a math or spelling test, the last time when I shouted, "Yes, your room is still a mess," the last time that you need me for a ride from here to there, the last time that you spend the night with your old tattered bear... My life keeps moving faster, stealing precious days that pass. I want to hold on longer, want to recognize your last.

The last time that you need my help with details of a dance, the last time that you ask me for advice about romance, the last time that you talk to me about your hopes and dreams, the last time that you wear a jersey for your high school team... I've watched you grow and barely noticed seasons as they pass. If I could freeze the hands of time, I'd hold on to your last. For come some bright fall morning, you'll be going far away. College life will beckon in a brilliant sort of way. One last hug, one last goodbye, one quick and hurried kiss, one last time to understand just how much you'll be missed. I'll watch you go and think how fast our time together passed. Let me hold on longer, God, to every precious last. Would you pray with me? Jesus.

Dr. Clinton:

Karen, all of this really circles back then to your family because they're so important to you. I know your love for Don, your husband, your children, your mom. Your mother's been to a number of our events. I've met her. I know the love you guys have together and what it means to your dad who's gone now. You've spoke about how he influenced you and your writing career. Just talk about family and how that's the core of where you're at. That's that life-changing piece that matters because we're all desperate for it.

Karen Kingsbury:

It really is. I just have to say for anyone, just, if you are struggling in any way with a relationship within your family, really seek God as to how you can be the peacemaker in that because God tells us three things, really. Jesus gave us three jobs, really: love God, love people, and make disciples. You can really fulfill the last two very easily if you just turn to your family.

I heard this. A pastor said this the other day, "You may have a disagreement with your brother, or with your mother, or whoever, but they're still your brother. They're still your mother, no matter how bad it is." God has built into our lives with family, a circle to love and evangelize to, to share the love of Christ with. We used to tell our kids when we would have our dinner games. We always played question games around the dinner table. We would say, "Look around because the faces you see here, those are going to be your best friends.

They're the ones that will be here when everyone else kind of comes and goes. These people will be your best friends." I think we did a pretty good job of brainwashing the kids because they're older now, and they're all best friends. They're having a great time together. Yes, it's everything.

Dr. Clinton: You also are involved in making movies. What a dynamic piece that that's brought to your life, your career, and more. You're not portraying a perfect world. Well, what you're trying to do is you're trying to communicate timeless truths that resonate in our heart that matter to us. We don't lose that. We don't get lost, that we don't lose the desire for it because when that happens, then you're really in trouble. You may be in a broken relationship. You may be in a busted world, but if you lose the hunger and the ache inside of you for love, to love and be loved, for wholeness. You know that?

Karen Kingsbury: Right.

Dr. Clinton: That's when we become shipwrecked, right?

Karen Kingsbury: Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's when it's a really difficult place to be in. Yes, I was going to say, I think that the messages that come with the stories... It might be a message of needing a father, for instance, a father figure. God wants to be that father figure. I can show that through story, or maybe it's a message of forgiveness. It might be a message of making things right and reconciliation in a relationship. All of those situations can be shown through story. What happens is the message gets in through the backdoor of the heart.

That's something that a storyteller who is uncomfortable writing about faith... They're not going to have that happen. I get to write about the physical story and the intellectual side of it, the emotional side of it, but also about the spiritual. By doing so, by the end, you better be changed. I mean, you should be wiping tears and thinking, "Okay, I'm ready to say I'm sorry to that person. I'm ready to make that phone call," something. It should drive you to some action in creating a better relationship with the people around you.

Dr. Clinton: Karen, you have kind of moved out of your lane that you traditionally write in, and you have a brand-new piece of work coming out called *A Distant Shore*. Tell us a little bit about it. I know our listeners out there are thinking, "I want to hear what she has to say about that book. I've been seeing it up on the shelf. Should I buy that?"

Karen Kingsbury: Well, *A Distant Shore*... I think it was the pandemic, honestly. I feel like being home and knowing that I couldn't go anywhere made me fictitiously want to be somewhere else. I wanted to be in Belize, the beautiful beaches of Belize. I've never been. One day, I'll do my reverse research and go there to say I have seen the beaches more than on Google Earth.

I thought, I want to tackle the issue of human trafficking. That was something. I wanted to give hope to people who were caught up in that or to drive others to maybe help with that problem. It's a huge problem. In fact, in my book, I wrote about there being five million people who are being trafficked. I had an FBI agent volunteer and come forward, who was the head of human trafficking. He can't give his name. I know his name, but he can't give his name. He read it, and he said, "No, Karen, it's 25 million, not 5 million." He was a wealth of knowledge, which was great.

It's really the story of Jack Ryder. He's a 26-year-old undercover FBI agent and really just lives for the job. He has no relationships outside of that. His parents are dead. He doesn't have any siblings. He is being told to go to Belize and to break up this trafficking ring, where this young woman, Eliza Lawrence, is 20. She is the kept princess in this very dark world. She's the only one that's untouched, but they're getting ready to marry her off to make two families that are trafficking drug families into one mega family, and she's the pawn.

He sets out to do a rescue. It brings these two people together and the passion to see human trafficking end. They get to go undercover on several different missions, posing as a married couple, and having separate rooms, obviously, but doing this very much on the up-and-up. It's just this story of angst and a lifestyle that we can't even begin to imagine.

Dr. Clinton: Fascinating.

Karen Kingsbury: Really, just to see the two of them... There's a catch to it that I don't want to give away, but I will just say that Jack had rescued this girl, not once, but twice on that distant shore.

Dr. Clinton: Wow. Sounds interesting. That's called *A Distant Shore*. You also are involved in a new project called "The Movement." I thought this was fascinating. Got a package in the mail at our home from Ms. Karen Kingsbury to Julie and I. It's built around a theme called "You Were Seen." Karen, tell us about it because you really believe this could be a tool that could really impact people for Christ and do a lot of good.

Karen Kingsbury: Thank you so much, Tim. It's our heartbeat right now as a family. The "You Were Seen Movement" started when we were... My husband and I were at a restaurant at a Chicago airport. This waiter... His name was George. He was amazing. He was so good. He was older. I don't know. He was pushing 60, probably, which isn't really that old now. The look in his eyes was, hey, I want to serve you, but there was something deeper, like maybe this wasn't his dream job. Maybe he didn't think when he was 20 and 25, "One day, when I'm pushing 60, I'll be waiting tables at the restaurant there at O'Hare."

We had a wonderful experience with him. He was quick because he was having to get to his other tables. All of a sudden, it hit me. All of my life and all of

George's life intersected in that one single moment, never to happen again. How would I tell this man about Jesus? When he would step off the floor, I could see the smile fade. I knew that he had a very heavy heart. I didn't know why. I just couldn't help myself, and tears started coming down my face. Just, I just couldn't help it. My husband looked at me and said, "Honey, what in the world is wrong with you? Are you thinking of a character, or what's happening?" I said, "I'm thinking of George. Who's going to tell him about Jesus?"

Now I know I can give him a big tip, and we did. You can say, God bless you, on the receipt, and we did. That's what you say when you sneeze. That's not what you would necessarily say to lead someone to Christ or to salvation. I said, "We have to have something we can carry that will tell them in a way that they can relate to, that they matter, that they're important." That I saw what they were doing, and they worked hard.

Then a website that would lead them to the Lord... The website is a very storytelling kind of version of why you need a Savior. You were seen today because of your hard work, but you are seen every day by your Heavenly Father. If you don't know who He is, let me tell you. It's very user-friendly, for almost anybody who would pick it up.

Dr. Clinton: Sure.

Karen Kingsbury: We link with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Dr. Clinton: I saw that.

Karen Kingsbury: Yes, their plan for salvation, their help links. Virtually, on a single card, they have access to a 24/7 prayer line that they could get help. One police officer got a card. Wasn't a believer, heading out to face rioters. This was over the summer. He called the hotline, and he said, "I don't know about this Jesus, but I can tell you this much. I need prayer. I need it right now." It was the beginning for him. We have heard story after story of people coming to know faith in Christ for the first time because they got a You Were Seen card.

These are for anyone. I mean, they're for the barista, the cashier, or the police officer in your path, certainly, a food server, really, anyone that you run across that you can hear the Lord saying, "This is the one. Make this a moment. Look them in their eyes. Get their name, and say, 'Hey, Tim, what you do matters. It's important. I just want you to know you were seen. Check out the website because you are seen every day.'"

Dr. Clinton: Recently, in a town close to us where we live, Karen, I just saw an article of a couple of waitresses who had received \$1,000 tips. It was four, five of them who were spread out because someone was visiting the city. It actually made the newspaper.

Karen Kingsbury: Wow.

Dr. Clinton: Because that kind of love, that kind of reach into another person's life... People are starved for it. The old saying is that you may be the only Jesus they'll ever see or they'll ever meet.

Karen Kingsbury: Right.

Dr. Clinton: God, help us all to do this. It's called The Movement.

Karen Kingsbury: You Were Seen.

Dr. Clinton: You Were Seen, youwereseen.com. Karen, like Dr. Dobson, you have a center at Liberty University. You focus in on training people how to write. You want to give that gift away. Tell us a little bit about what's happening there or what you're doing.

Karen Kingsbury: Well, they just didn't have a fiction track. It matters. I have mentioned Liberty in many of my books just because if somebody has to go to college, they may as well go to Liberty University. I always love to share that, just the gem that Liberty is. They didn't have this fiction track. We sat down. I sat down with the department, and we sort of mapped out what some things that I thought would be helpful if they wanted to train students how to write a novel and flesh those out. Did a lot of video teaching and video content. Now they have a genuine... It's a minor going toward a major in fiction writing.

Dr. Clinton: Wow. Can you imagine a generation of writers coming up, telling stories to encourage people to grow in their faith walk and to live life to its fullest?

Karen Kingsbury: Right.

Dr. Clinton: Let's close this way. Karen, you're missional. We've mentioned that. You write life-changing fiction. People often try to anticipate the end, even when they open the first page. Where are we going to go? For those who are listening out here today, some of them... Well, we all live in a story. Sometimes the stories are dark. We feel lost. We don't know where we're at. Karen, in the end, where do we all go? What's it all about? What's the message that we need to take with us?

Karen Kingsbury: I think there's storms in life. Right now, you might be in the middle of a storm. That could be the case. It's going to be the case at some point. You're either leaving one, heading toward one, or right in the middle. It was something that Austin said to me once when he was little. He had already watched a movie we were going to watch. I didn't know it. I'm watching him for his reaction, thinking he should be so sad, and he's smiling. I said, "Buddy, you're so happy. I thought this was kind of a sad movie." He said, "Oh, Mom, I've already seen it." He said, "I've seen the ending. Guaranteed happy ending, Mom." I just thought, with



Jesus as the hero of our story, whatever you're going through right now, you can be perfectly happy to know it is a guaranteed happy ending with Jesus as the hero.

Dr. Clinton: I remember reading to my daughter, Megan, and Zach when they were little. We would always end the story this way, "Everyone danced for joy." In the scriptures, it's like this. "May He turn even your morning, your brokenness, into dancing."

Karen Kingsbury: Amen.

Dr. Clinton: Everyone danced for joy. Karen, what a delight to spend a few moments with you. We pray God's continued blessing on you. I know Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the team at JDFI, the James Dobson Family Institute, Family Talk... We all salute you and celebrate the work that God's doing in and through you and your family. Thanks for joining us.

Karen Kingsbury: Thank you so much. Tell them all, too, my love to all of them.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a fascinating conversation with a very gifted and wise woman of God. By the way, Karen Kingsbury's newest book is called A Distant Shore, and it comes out next week on April 27th. You can pick up a copy wherever books are sold. Now, if you want to learn more about Karen Kingsbury, her books, or her latest ministry efforts with the You Were Seen cards, you can find all that information and more when you go to our broadcast page at [Drjamesdobson.org](http://Drjamesdobson.org). That's D-R, [jamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://jamesdobson.org/broadcast). Thanks so much for listening to Family Talk today. For Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, and all of us here at the James Dobson Family Institute, I'm Roger Marsh. Hope you have a blessed weekend.

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