



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: A Lifeline to Moms: God's Plan for the Overwhelmed Mom

Guest(s): Sarah Parshall Perry

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Roger Marsh: Well, hello everyone and welcome to Family Talk, the listener supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Thank you so much for joining us today. In just a moment, you're going to be hearing the conclusion of a conversation that Dr. Dobson had with author Sarah Parshall Perry back in 2017. They discussed Sarah's book, *Mommy Needs a Raise (Because Quitting is Not an Option.)* Moms have one of the most difficult jobs out there. Yet, they don't always get the recognition or appreciation they deserve. On yesterday's broadcast, Sarah Parshall Perry shared about some of the stressors of being a mom with two kids on the autism spectrum. Today, she and Dr. Dobson will discuss the jarring transition that some moms experience when they go from the working world to being a stay-at-home mom. They'll also talk about how sharing the love and knowledge of Jesus Christ with your kids is a Christian parents' paramount priority. This is a very special interview for Dr. Dobson and he hopes that every mom listening to us today will be encouraged by it. So let's listen to it right now.

Dr. James Dobson: Sarah, we discussed last time that you have three children and two of them are what's called high functioning autism, which is also called Asperger's.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: And people will understand that if they have that in their family or anywhere relative to your kids. Describe for those who don't know what that life is like and what the challenges are of an autistic child.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes.

So autism has been described as a spectrum. Now the DSMs just changed it, so now it all falls under the title of ASD, which is autism spectrum disorder, which I almost feel just-

Dr. James Dobson: So Asperger's is no longer a-

Sarah Parshall Perry: Asperger's is no longer, but he originally had an Asperger's diagnosis. So for the sake of understanding for his teachers and his clinicians, that has followed him through. But I almost feel as though it does a disservice to the kids who are lower functioning, to lump them in with the kids who are very verbal and who are higher functioning. But there is a panoply of issues that really affects every aspect of development. So there are sensory issues, and this was part of the title for *Sand In My Sandwich*. I made Noah peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, but rather than grape jelly, one day we used strawberry. Well, the seeds set him to gagging. And he told me, mom, there is sand in my sandwich. And I thought, what? We're in the middle of landlocked Maryland in the country.

Dr. James Dobson: That's the title for your book, I now see what you are doing.

Sarah Parshall Perry: That's the title of the book. Absolutely. So it was something where I thought, well, that's really interesting. And then there were complaints about the fact that his clothes were too scratchy and the sounds on the TV were too loud. We took him to birthday parties and everyone would sing Happy Birthday, and he would scream. And I thought, okay, maybe he was just startled, but this was a repetitive habit. And so again, the Lord's so good, He gives us these pieces and we start to see a pattern that He wants us to pay attention to. And so the Holy Spirit said, go, go get this checked out.

So when we had him diagnosed at five, which is very rare for a child who's higher functioning autistic, because as you know so well, kids hit developmental milestones at different times.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Some of them will be a little late, some of them will be a little early. But really there is a saying in the autism community that time is brain. And so if there's anyone who's dealing with any question as to the developmental stages of your child's life, I cannot encourage you enough to go get it examined. That may be the Holy Spirit prompting you. Worst case scenario, you're an anxious mom or dad.

Dr. James Dobson: And therein lies the problem because frequently the professional community, sometimes pediatricians and nurses and other medical people, even sometimes neurologists misdiagnose this autistic child, especially if he's high functioning.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And on that end of the spectrum. And yet early treatment is everything.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh, it absolutely is. It absolutely is. I cannot encourage parents enough. And we had the benefit of having all three of our children tracked at Kennedy Krieger because our neurologist was also a researcher. And so he wanted to see what the development was of the subsequent kids. And there is an increased

likelihood if you have one boy on the spectrum, that you will have a second boy on the spectrum, about a 18 to 20% chance. And so when my youngest at four started to spin repetitively and found certain tactile things in our house to cling to and had to carry things to rub against his face because there was something comforting in that and was slow in the development of his speech, I thought, oh Lord, really? Really? We got to go through this again. So we went back to our neurologist and he said, yes, but you knew this was coming. And we're at the starting line even earlier this time around. And so that time is brain methodology has blessed our family tremendously. So even if you are swimming upstream against diagnoses, those moms and dads who are listening, I just encourage you to keep at it because if you lack peace, in my mind, you also lack a diagnosis because the Holy Spirit does not whisper if there is a question. He will shout, and that's worked for us.

Dr. James Dobson: And He frequently tells a mother before He tells anybody else.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes, He does. And that is how it has worked in my life.

Dr. James Dobson: Did your son, one of them, tell you, I don't want to be autistic anymore?

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes. Yes, he did. And boy.

Dr. James Dobson: Did that just sort of tear at your heart?

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh boy, you anticipate mother struggles. And then there are the epic battles that you think, Lord, I was expecting a garden variety kid and this is above my pay grade on this. How do I possibly answer him? And so you pray quickly that the Lord give you the words because you think, okay, this is kind of do or die. How do you respond to something you know he will never be cured of? In fact, our neurologist said, listen, I'm going to be honest with you, the term high functioning is kind of a misnomer because he's always going to have to work hard to assimilate. By the grace of God, we had fabulous clinicians, and the hand flapping is gone because they taught him when he wanted to flap his hands to put his clenched fists in his pockets. And so now instead of flapping his hands, go in his pockets, and that doesn't draw the attention that the flapping did. So this-

Dr. James Dobson: Now, people who didn't hear the program yesterday are not going to understand what you just said.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Talk about hand flapping.

Sarah Parshall Perry: So our son, Noah, that first giveaway for me as his mom was the repetitive hand flapping. And that is just a hallmark of autism as you know.

Dr. James Dobson: It is.

Sarah Parshall Perry: So he at nine months was flapping his hands. And I thought, oh, wait a minute. I don't think he's supposed to be doing that. At first it was okay, maybe he's just excitable. And then as it continued and got more intense, I thought, oh, Father, I think there's something that we need to check out here. So for us, there are ways that we deal with the problems that come up, but that particular question, that statement, I don't want to be autistic anymore. We have-

Dr. James Dobson: Did you cry?

Sarah Parshall Perry: I did. I did. And I told him, Noah, you know what? I understand that desire, but can I tell you something? I would not want you any other way because you are precisely the way God wired you, you are perfect in His creation.

Dr. James Dobson: What a wonderful answer.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Well, I'll tell you what, that is one of those that was the Lord speaking through me because I thought, all right, this is a 500 level parenting class and he's only eight, and I'm not sure I'm prepared for this. But to this day, I hold to the same thing. They have their struggles. It is increased work for us, but I would not have them any other way. I couldn't imagine loving them anymore than I do now because of the specific way the Lord saw fit to put them together and that included their diagnoses.

Dr. James Dobson: You were on a very fast track in terms of the legal profession, and then God called you to be a mom.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yep.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm sure that wasn't a difficult case to make.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, the title of your book is *Mommy Needs a Raise (Because Quitting is Not an Option.)* That's funny, but that's really not so funny.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Right. Right. Because you can't leave, your bosses are tyrants and they're filthy and you can't quit. So you have to figure out a way to make peace with it. I found it very uniquely challenging because of the element of chaos and unpredictability. I had thrived my whole life on order. So I am a typical firstborn, okay? I am very order driven. I am hyper performing. I'm an overachiever, and boy, I was going to win at mothering. I was going to do it right. And so it was Mommy and Me classes and Baby Einstein videos and music and art and play dates. And that worked for one child. And then the second came around and I think she had a couple of pictures thrown in a bin, and that's what she got in terms of mementos.

Dr. James Dobson: Are any of the three of your children strong-willed?

Sarah Parshall Perry: My middle, my daughter, right in the middle is.

Dr. James Dobson: The one that is not autistic.

Sarah Parshall Perry: She is neurotypical.

Dr. James Dobson: So you got three for three.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh, I got three for three, let me tell you. She is 10 and acts every bit of 20. She will go nose to nose all the time, door slamming, loud voices, throwing things. And I think, Lord, could you just have made one easy? Could you have just have given me a given me a gimme? That would've been so nice.

But it was a tough transition. So I found myself going, all right, this can't be about achievement. This cannot be about performance. That's what I understand. So all of my schedules, my plans, I'm going to have this one potty-trained by the end of the day, we're going to go to Mommy and Me class with this one, I'm going to have the house cleaned and I'm going to have duck a l'orange in the oven by the time you come home. Nope, nope. I tried that once and then I thought, well, I'm going to have a nervous breakdown, and that's not good for any of the kids and also not for my husband. So I decided, you know what, Lord, this is effort and then it is trust with the results. So I'm just going to work harder at loving them and not keeping up with whatever standard I've set for myself.

Dr. James Dobson: Sarah, this interview yesterday and today brings tears to eyes because I can just envision people listening to us, women probably maybe some men, but women most certainly have gone through all the things you described except autism. It may not be autism, it may just be a tough as nails kid. It may be a child who does not succeed in school. It may be other boys and girls that bully your child. There's a thousand things that can tear the heart out of a mom.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh, yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: And you're talking to some of them today. I would like you to talk to the Lord right now on behalf of the woman who's there.

Sarah Parshall Perry: If I can do it without crying.

Dr. James Dobson: Would you do that?

Well, I'm having trouble too, because I can just imagine what that is for the people. And the Lord put us together today for a reason. This program is airing today for a person. Talk to the Lord about him or her.

Sarah Parshall Perry: I will, I will.

Dr. James Dobson: But especially her.

Sarah Parshall Perry: I will.

Lord, we are so glad that you hear us. And Lord, this mom or daddy may be sitting cross-legged on the floor somewhere with a kid who has a cold or who is running a fever and may be sitting in a house that's a mess. And maybe they've just moved or maybe they're getting ready to move. Maybe they've lost a parent. Maybe their child is struggling in school. Maybe their child is ill or has just received a diagnosis, Father. Father, some days surviving parenthood feels like that's all we can do. I don't feel like I have achieved much in this except for the fact that I was faithful in loving them.

Lord, I just pray that you would reach your hand out to that mom or dad who thinks, man, parenting is tough. It is harder than any job, but it is so rewarding. Father, I pray that you would just put your hand on them. Show them that this great privilege of being a parent, of being a mom, of carrying a life is proof that we have lived and have left something wonderful of yours behind.

Lord, I just pray that you would give them peace today, and I pray that you would use those kiddos to love them specifically. Your word talks about out of the mouths of babes. And let me tell you, some truth has come out of the mouths of mine. You have spoken to me through them. May that mom or dad hear that word of love from you today, and may they be encouraged that they are doing the greatest job ever known. We pray these things in your sweet saving name. Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, what a beautiful prayer. Sarah, I'm sure getting those kids to Heaven is your highest priority.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes, it is.

Dr. James Dobson: How are you working on that?

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh, we have three kids who profess the Lord as their Savior and are great evangelists. And the middle one, the bossy one, she loves asking her friends, have you accepted Jesus yet? So she's up and down the street every day just telling them, I hope that you're praying, and if not, you need to come to church with me. So she is just the most exceptional little thing, and my children love the Lord, and we spend time worshiping together and praying together. And let me tell you that is incredible. And I have told my kids-

Dr. James Dobson: Can you hold them still long enough to hear the Scripture?

Sarah Parshall Perry: For about two minutes. And so we do tiny segments, and usually it's a verse, and then we repeat that verse during the day. So by the end of the day, they are able to hide that word in their heart. And we can't always remember it so sometimes we go back, but they all have devotional bibles and I pray with them individually every night so they get a chance to talk to God about what's on their heart. So we're so privileged that our kids know the Lord. And let me tell you, for kids who have issues with anxiety to say, we are going to be together forever, how cool that we get to spend eternity together, our heavenly Father is giving you your earthly father and mother to be with forever, because we all know Jesus. I mean, what a blessing that is to be able to say,

Dr. James Dobson: Talk about the ministry of women friends. Do you have women friends who-

Sarah Parshall Perry: I do.

Dr. James Dobson: ... understand where you are and-

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh my goodness.

Dr. James Dobson: ... going through similar needs?

Sarah Parshall Perry: Let me tell you, I'm a firm believer in that the Lord designs us for a community, and we are to exhort each other and encourage each other and lift each other up. And when you are home with children, it is so important to find other moms who are also home with children, so that you can say, man, I feel like I totally messed up today. How did you do today? And we can encourage each other and lift each other up and pray for each other. And that's part of what I talked about in the book about if anyone should know the need to support and encourage, it's moms, it's Christian moms who understand the inscrutable unending work of motherhood and how we need to take that and use it as an opportunity to not only bless our kids, but bless each other because these are fellow soldiers in this incredible, incredible calling. So it's important to find people, if not through your church and through a mops group or through a Bible study, through a small group who understand where you are in your life. It's been incredibly supportive for me.

And I have a great mom who told me once when I was making this decision to stay home. Listen, women live their lives in seasons. This is your season right now with these kids.

Dr. James Dobson: It won't always be this way.

Sarah Parshall Perry: That's it. And you're not going to lose what God gave you. And sure enough, as we talked about, the Lord was just faithful to say, okay, I'm calling you back to work now. And it was only the Lord's perfect intervention and timing as it always is.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the Lord put a certain soul in women.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: He didn't give it to men. I don't think men could do that job. I mean, some of them do.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: But where you got the kind of challenge you're talking about, that requires something that women have that men don't.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yeah. I agree. I agree. And I think my husband, if he were here, would also agree. And I think there's a tenderness particularly that my anxious boys need because anxiety goes hand in hand as you know with autism spectrum disorders. And they-

Dr. James Dobson: What are yours most anxious about?

Sarah Parshall Perry: My youngest, Jesse, is very afraid of death. He's very afraid he's going to lose us, and he's the one for whom that message of, guess what buddy? You have Jesus in your heart. We have Jesus in our heart. We are not going anywhere, man, even if we're separated for a short time, the Lord is going to reunite us. What a privilege and what a safety in being able to know that going forward. And nothing will happen before God's time.

Dr. James Dobson: What a burden for a child to carry.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes, particularly one so young. He was a kid who at four, and this will give you some insight into my daily life. I was standing outside our house and there was a big plate glass window, and I was saying goodbye to a friend who'd come to visit, and he had gotten off the couch and ran to the window because he saw me but couldn't get to me, couldn't work the doorknob, and threw a Tonka truck, a metal truck through the plate glass window and crawled through bare chested. Thank God again, only His miraculous intervention, my girlfriend I was saying goodbye to was a pediatric nurse, only the Lord. So we put him in the bathtub, we removed every single piece of glass. We taped him up. She said, take him to the doctor tomorrow. I'll call ahead just... But those are the levels of fear that he deals with. So his anxiety is very, very encompassing. And my other has gone the other direction where he is also afraid of death, but he tells all of my friends, he wants to be a mortician.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, does he?

Sarah Parshall Perry: And I say, Noah, maybe forensic scientists, maybe the Lord's calling you into the scientific arts. I don't know. But they have their own unique way of dealing with things. So I ask a lot of why questions.

Dr. James Dobson: Discipline is often a problem for an autistic child.

Sarah Parshall Perry: It really is.

Dr. James Dobson: Have you been able to negotiate that one?

Sarah Parshall Perry: We are trying. That is a daily struggle because also now, knowing that our oldest is 13, and so there is that sort of typical power play now with dad. And I want to sort of differentiate myself. I want to push some boundaries. I want to see how far this will go and if you still love me. So there's a lot of that. So it's, Noah, we're turning off technology now for the night at eight o'clock, and then he'll sneak into the bedroom and take the iPad and go back to his bedroom. Well, then, as much as he loves technology and as much as he finds it calming for him, we're going to have to make good on the promise to take it away from him.

Dr. James Dobson: And you've got to resist the temptation to say, well, he's a different child, and I can't make him mind because that would frustrate him. I mean, you've got to go ahead and lead, don't you?

Sarah Parshall Perry: Yes. Yes. In fact, it's so funny because Temple Grand and there was a biography movie that was filmed about her life. I heard her speak once, and she's a world expert on autism because she has Asperger's and she is a professor, and I believe it's at Colorado State in animal science. But I heard her speak once, and she said, don't treat them differently than your other children. And that's hard because boy, I want to-

Dr. James Dobson: You'll handicap them if you do.

Sarah Parshall Perry: That's it.

Dr. James Dobson: You cripple them.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Right. And I don't want his whole world to be soft and comfortable because the world outside can be very hard and very painful, and I want to prepare him for that, so he is ready to meet the battles that the Lord has for him. But it's hard. Boy, it's hard. My mother's heart wants to say, "Oh, buddy, I know your anxiety is off the charts right now, but I'm sorry we have to carry through with this punishment." So I think my husband and I are a good ballast for each other in that respect because he doesn't have a problem.

Dr. James Dobson: Sarah, I don't want to pander to you, but I want to tell you, you're a very impressive lady.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh, thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: And a great mom.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: And for you to sit down and put into words the things we've been talking about today and what you put in your book is a godsend for a lot of people. And I just hope that that book will sell a million copies because those parents are out there.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: And it's been so good having you here.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Oh, I've loved it. I've loved it, doctor, thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: You have an invitation.

Sarah Parshall Perry: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: Come back.

Sarah Parshall Perry: I would love it.

Dr. James Dobson: Blessings to you.

Sarah Parshall Perry: I'd love it. Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, what an inspiration to all of us, no matter if you're a mom or a dad for that matter. Friend, you're listening to Family Talk, and that was the conclusion of Dr. Dobson's two-day conversation with Sarah Parshall Perry. We've entitled these two days of programming "A Lifeline for Moms." Yesterday in part one, we talked about defining real expectations. And during today's broadcast, which is part two of the conversation, we focused on dealing with the pressures of feeling overwhelmed. If you'd like to go back and listen to either Part one or part two, any part of the broadcast that you missed, just simply visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. That's drjamesdobson.org/broadcast.

Remember, you can also access the entire broadcast on the official Family Talk app. If you don't have the app or you need the updated version, you can download it from your app store today.

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I'm Roger Marsh, and from all of us here at the JDFI, Happy Mother's Day. And by the way, guys, remember it's not too late to buy that card or make that call sometime this weekend. Reach out, express your love and gratitude for the mom in your life or the moms in your life. As for me, a personal note to my mom who is listening. Mom, I really love you for everything you've done to raise me and my sister, Linda, and my brother Brian, the right way. Thank you so much for taking care of Dad too, and I'll be sure to be in touch with you on Sunday, especially as we get ready to celebrate your 90th birthday next month.

Hope you have a wonderful weekend and a blessed Mother's Day. From all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks for listening. Join us again Monday for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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