



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Embrace Grace: A Loving Ministry for Unplanned Pregnancies

Guest(s): Amy Ford

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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: Thank you for listening to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and the program you're about to hear was recorded in January 2022 at the National March for Life in Washington, DC. Enjoy.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, president of the American Association of Christian Counselors and co-host. We're coming to you from Washington, DC the day after the powerful March for Life. Let me tell you, the energy was incredible here yesterday. I'll tell you in the program. You're going to hear from a woman who experienced an unplanned pregnancy at a young age and who ultimately decided to choose life.

She has now dedicated her life to helping others find their place in the pro-life movement. Her name, Amy Ford. Amy is co-founder and president of Embrace Grace. It's a nonprofit that inspires and equips the church, oh I really love this, to love on single and pregnant women, young women and their families. She's the author of a new book called *Help Her Be Brave: Discover Your Place in the Pro-Life Movement*.

She speaks nationally to varied audiences, including women's ministry events, pro-life and adoption conferences, church leadership equipping and pregnancy center benefits, and more. Serving in Embrace Grace, she has countless stories about churches and pregnancy centers and the body of Christ that have come together to impact communities in a beautiful way. Amy, welcome to Family Talk.

Amy Ford: Thanks so much for having me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The energy up here in Washington is just wild. We're in a hotel where the Students For Life event is being held and the place is packed. Kids are walking around this place. Just the hallways are jammed. They are so excited. I love the t-shirts and the sweatshirts. "I am the pro-life generation." Amy, it's pretty amazing, isn't it?

Amy Ford: Yeah, there's definitely a lot of buzz. It's so encouraging to see the younger generation wanting to jump in and not necessarily just take a stance on something, but they actually want to be the change and they want to find a place to get involved, which I'm so passionate about. We always say an at Embrace Grace that pro-life is a stance, but pro-love is in action. It's God's kindness that leads us to repentance.

It's His love that draws us to His side, and so seeing them wanting to take action and really get involved. They're not just coming to a march. They are serving through Students For Life, looking into their communities of how they can help these women that have unexpected pregnancies. They are doing more than just taking a stance. They are pro-love, which is awesome.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, we're going to talk more about the amazing ministry that you're involved in and giving leadership to, which is more than impressive. But everybody has a story. Stuff kind of upstream, if you will, that influences why they are where they are. And yours is one of those incredible stories. Take us back. Growing up, I guess, did you grow up in a family that was pro-life?

Amy Ford: Yeah, actually they were. And what's weird is I even have a memory of standing outside an abortion clinic and praying outside with my family, but I didn't really understand what we were doing. I kept thinking, "Oh, we're praying to save a baby," but I never really thought about the mom and what she might be thinking. I went to church every week, had a great family, but I didn't have a relationship with the Lord. There is a difference.

You go to church and not have a relationship with the Lord, and that was me. I ended up finding out I was pregnant when I was 19. Totally terrified, scared to tell my parents, and the father of the baby felt the same way. We out of fear made an abortion appointment. Paid for the abortion. When I went in to have it done, the nurses were telling me how they were going to do it. I ended up hyperventilating and passing out in the abortion room.

When I came to, the nurses were fanning me. They were trying to give me a drink of water. One nurse said, "You're too emotionally distraught to make this decision today. You can come back another day, but today you're not having an abortion." I went back out in the waiting room and the father of the baby was out there. My face was swollen from crying so hard. I just looked at him and I said, "We're still pregnant." We just in that moment, okay, let's figure it out.

The enemy lies to you and tells you these worst case scenarios. We thought we were going to be homeless. We thought our dreams were over, our lives were over, that our parents were going to hate us. All of these terrible thoughts that kind of just bombard you in that crisis moment. We told our parents. It wasn't as bad as we thought it would be. They definitely were disappointed in the timing, but it wasn't bad.

But we had been together for a long time and knew we wanted to get married someday. Wasn't necessarily in the plans in this order. The man that had led my husband to the Lord years before, this pastor, we asked him if he would marry us. And he said, "No, I'm sorry. Because you've sinned, I will not marry you." We were like, "We are such horrible people. We can't even get married right. We can't be blessed." We ended up finding someone else who would marry us.

It was a beautiful wedding, but it felt like this shroud of shame, as a Scarlet letter on your wedding day. All of that just made me think about, what did I need during that time in my life to not have to go through everything I went through, going to the abortion clinic, and all of that? Because I ended up having a son who is so amazing. He's now 23, and he just graduated from Oral Roberts University. He's a pro-life speaker. Speaks all over.

I love his perspective is that he was an overcomer before he was ever even born, and that Satan had a plan to take him out, but he's here and he's going to use his life to change the world.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I love that.

Amy Ford: And I love that. What did I need during that time? I think that if I went to church every single week when I was in that crisis moment, why didn't I have the thought, you know what? I could call a pastor and ask for prayer, wisdom, guidance, support, some kind of direction. But it was the last place I wanted to go to. I think people like that are everywhere. They don't feel comfortable going to the church. We want to change that.

We want the church to be one of the first places a girl runs to instead of the last because of shame and guilt. One thing that's cool, I got to add this to the story, is that pastor that wouldn't marry us, he called my husband out of the blue two years later and he asked for forgiveness. He said he felt like it was his worst mistake in pastoring history that he had ever made. He asked for forgiveness, which, of course, my husband was like, "Yes!" He loves this guy.

And then when my son was 16, that pastor had asked me to come speak at his church about pro-love. It was Mother's Day. I came and I did my thing, and he was very open with his congregation before I had gotten there about what he had done years ago. He told the whole church about it, how he had a religious spirit, a Pharisee heart, and he did this, but then Embrace Grace was birthed. He told them all. I spoke. I did my thing.

And afterwards, he came back on the platform and he said, "Amy, years ago I asked your husband for forgiveness, but I never really asked you. Will you forgive me?" I said, "It was 16 years ago. Of course, I forgave you a long time ago." Well, then he looked at my son and he said, "Will you forgive me for planting seeds of rejection in your heart before you were ever even born? And while you were in your mother's womb, I rejected you. Will you forgive me?"

Dr. Tim Clinton: What a story.

Amy Ford: And my son, 16, in front of the whole church says, "I forgive you." It was such a powerful moment. I mean, you could feel church wounds being lifted in that room. People would just have their jaws dropped. The fact that this pastor would humble himself in that way in front of everyone is just... And it was so healing for even Jess, because I told him his story at 13, and for a while he did struggle with like, am I supposed to be here? The enemy lies to him too.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Wow.

Amy Ford: But God does turn all things for good for those that love him and that's what He did for us.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Amy, I want to step back for a moment and go into a lot of people talk about a 24 hour window. That there's this critical time where all of the chaos and confusion of the moment and typically a young woman is going to make a decision about whether or not she's going to abort her baby. Being in that moment is everything. Can you go back there and just talk about what was happening in your own heart and mind? You grew up a Christian girl. I heard you use the word shame. A lot of shame. It's like an insane moment, isn't it? People don't realize how critical those hours are.

Amy Ford: For sure. I know for sure it's like I kind of went into robot mode. Sometimes people respond to trauma in different ways and you know that more than anybody. I went into robot mode like, just get through this. Go through the motions. Even though I knew in my heart abortion was wrong, it became a real option because of fear, and fear makes you do crazy things. And unless you can take a higher perspective when you're in that trauma mode, you can't think straight.

I'm just going through the motions. Like everything's going to be fine. I'm not going to feel anything, and I'm just going to go through the motions. It caught up to me in that abortion room when I ended up hyperventilating and passing out. You can stuff it down for as long as you can, but eventually it's going to come out and I'm thankful it did because...

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's very traumatic.

Amy Ford: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: A lot of people don't understand. When we talk about trauma, we often say this, that people don't remember that moment, they reexperience it. I remember I was working with a lady one time, we were in a counseling session, and she was married and had had a couple of children, And then got into a strained conflictual relationship with her husband. Something happened where he had to go work out west, battling, horrible.

She's living alone, not very well taken care of, wants to be loved. He comes back. Somehow she winds up pregnant again, and then he's gone. He leaves again. And then she in the midst of is overwhelmed and makes the decision to abort her baby and she did. We're in the counseling session and she's saying, "There's something that I want to tell you," and she would do this each week to me.

She'd say, "There's something I want to tell you. But if I told you, he wouldn't like me anymore." And I'd say, "You know what? I don't think there's something that you would tell me."

Amy Ford: Try me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. The day came, Amy, where she decided to tell me what had happened. She told me story, but she didn't stop there. She said, "But here's the problem, Tim. At night, all I hear are babies screaming. I hear baby screaming every night. Do you think God will forgive me?" And I remember the moment where we together talked about God's forgiveness and I said, "He forgives you." And she just balled. I mean, tears flowing everywhere and just cried her eyes out.

And in that moment, I thought about how dark and how difficult it was to live in that world. You know that? And when you begin to tell your story of God's grace coming back in, but there are wounds that a lot of these women have carried for years. You know that? Go back to that moment. If we don't step up in those moments, if the church doesn't figure that out, if the people of God don't figure that out, how are we supposed to help?

Amy Ford: Don't get me started.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I'm trying to load the guns up here. I'm trying to give a softball right down in the middle.

Amy Ford: Right. I know. The church has to be known for what we're for, more for what we're for than what we're against. We have to be known for our love, and we have to be known as a beacon of hope when people are going through a really hard tragedy.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I know people say, "Hey, we don't want to condone this sin. Hey, wait a second, these guys are..." But at the same time, we've got to step up into these moments.

Amy Ford: Right. Life and death is on the line and we have to be known for... Even if someone's never step foot into a church. If we could be known to say, "This is a safe place for you to come and get help and resources and to know what's available in your community," the church needs to know about their pregnancy centers in their neighborhood. They need to know about all the things so that they can be on the frontlines helping these women.

Tony Evans is one of my favorite preachers, and he says that the pregnancy centers are the first response team and the church is the hospital. And I love that. If we can be the hospital for these women and even women that have had abortions for healing and hope. There are so many that are walking around that have experienced a major trauma and they won't talk about it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I think there's an army out there.

Amy Ford: For sure. I think if we can help set these women and men free, it would change the culture. It would change everything in our churches, because free people free people. It would start a revival in our churches if we can help, because one in four have experienced an abortion and the abortion rate is exactly the same inside the church as it is outside. I saw that CareNet and Lifeway just did a study a couple years ago and they had some stats, but one of them shocked me.

It said 47% of women that are here, if they are at church... These are women that have experienced an abortion. If they're at church and they hear the pastor talk about forgiveness, that 47% of them feel like it doesn't apply to them because of their abortion. That's huge. They're sitting in our pews and don't even feel like there's forgiveness for them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I don't think people get the numbers here. If you think over 60 million abortions, that's a lot of women and a lot of women out there, Christian women, who are seated out there. And when the pastor begins to speak about abortion, they close up. You can see their spirit just close up because they want to a wall it off because they don't want to go back there because all they do... They don't remember. They're re-experiencing this thing all over again.

They can't go there. They need the grace of God to touch them in those places. You decided to do something about that. You wrote a book called *Help Her Be Brave*. I love that title, by the way. You want to help people to know what to say when they don't what to say, what to do when they don't know what to do. Tell us the heart of that book.

Amy Ford: Yeah. Well, *Help Her Be Brave*, the title, is... Well, if you look at the top five reasons why women have abortions, fear is the root. It could be fear of finances being interrupted or school, parents being mad.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Embarrassed. Shame.

Amy Ford: Being alone. It's all fear. Fear is the root of all of those. We want to help her be brave. I believe that God has given each one of us talent, strengths, gifts that we can use to make abortion unthinkable. One time I was talking to a friend that is in a pro-life atheist actually. She came up to me and asked me to speak at this event at Berkeley College and she said, "I'm going to have pro-life speakers all day." She asked me to speak.

I said, "I can, but you know I talk about God and I talk about at the church. I know you're an atheist. Is that an issue?" And she said, "No. You need to say what you need to say." She said, "I don't believe in your God, but I believe in the power of your people. And if you get your people to actually do something, this issue wouldn't be an issue anymore." I was like wow! I mean, that's true. There's over 300,000 churches in America.

If we all were doing something, if we were on the front lines helping these women, using our strengths, talents, and gifts to help make abortion unthinkable, not just through the pregnancy. But even for single moms, we all have something to give. This book, it has over 300 ideas of how to get involved in the movement. I started Embrace Grace and I never thought, "I'm starting a pro-life organization." I didn't even know there was a pro-life movement.

I went to church my whole life. If someone said, "I work in the pro-life movement," I would've assumed that they meant picketing. I had no idea, and I had been asked to go to a conference, a CareNet conference, and have a booth. And I was like, "Sure, I've never heard of you." There were so many different pro-life organizations and resources that are boots on the ground helping these women. How did I go my whole life and not know about this?

When I was pregnant, I went to church every week. No one told me that there was help like this. I think that most people in the church don't know that there's a movement. This book helps give you all of the resources, all of the amazing organizations, the practical ideas. Even with my husband, he's like, "I don't know what I'm good at. What can I do? I'm a guy," whatever. He's really good at finances. He's good at helping people with their finances. He helps them with their checkbooks.

Dr. Tim Clinton: To go what to do, because what a lonely difficult road. Most of these women go it alone.

Amy Ford: For sure.

Dr. Tim Clinton: They're parenting alone. They don't have anybody to stand with them, and they're ostracized. They're kicked out of the house. It's just, what a nightmare. This doesn't mean that we aren't standing for purity. We aren't challenging young teens, young men and women, to live in purity. What we're saying is we need some compassion and empathy here for those who are in this mess and they need love done and they need help.

Amy, let's stay with the issue of purity for a second, because it's difficult. Your perspective on, what do I do? How do I look at purity now in my life?

Amy Ford: Yeah. Well, I know it's hard for girls. I was a church girl. I grew up in church my whole life. I went to youth group and they talked about purity and true love waits and all of that. I have my purity ring and all of that, but then I messed up.

The church girls, what we think in our mind is, "Well, since now I'm not pure, then that means I'm impure. I'm dirty." And that's forever. It's not reversible. It is that I'm impure, and that is what goes through our mind.

We take our rings, and I've seen this so many times with Embrace Grace church girls. They stuff their rings in the bottom corner of their jewelry box because they can't wear it anymore because now they've lost their purity. When really, as believers, we can't lose our purity. We have been washed white as snow. We need to start talking more about sex in the church. We need to start talking about what the natural consequences of sin is, what the natural consequences of sex is, why God wants us to stay abstinent.

We can't lose our purity, but we can lose our virginity. And here's what that looks like. It's not good, but God is a God of mercy and he's new every day. If you have a purity ring... My daughter wanted a purity ring. I was like, "Listen, we're going to have a talk about this." She has one, but what we call it is a pure heart ring. What does it look like to have a pure heart and stay in connection with the Holy Spirit?

If you do mess up, and I hope you don't, but if you do, His mercies are new every morning. You don't have to take that ring off because you're still pure. You just ask God for forgiveness and you repent and you try again the next day. That is the direction I feel like we need to go in because these girls are kind of going off the deep end. When they mess up once, then they're just like mess up all the time.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Amy, that's what shame does. Shame takes you to a place where you just think, "You know what? It doesn't matter anymore." And that's so sad. It's for freedom that Christ has come to set us free.

Amy Ford: That's good.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We need freedom, not bondage.

Amy Ford: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Amy, in 2008, you started an organization called Embrace Grace. Again, got to be a little narrative behind all that.

Amy Ford: Yeah. Well, it actually didn't start as an organization. It started as a small group at my church. I was at a women's come conference, and it was really the first time I started going back to church after all my church wounds when I was pregnant. I started going back to church and it was during a women's conference. Christine Caine was preaching and Kari Jobe was leading worship. I had a vision and it was of me... It was like snapshots.

It was of me being pregnant years ago and I looked really sad. But then the snapshots, which were so vivid, changed to me throwing baby showers. And I love throwing baby showers. I am a hostess with the mostess. That year I had thrown 13 baby showers for my girlfriends. It changed to that, and I was like, what did that mean? That was so real. It was just right. It was almost like I was seeing snapshots. I ran into the group's pastor at my church, Gateway, and I said, "This is what I saw."

And she said, "Why don't you just start a small group for girls with unplanned pregnancies? And the baby shower can be the hook to get them in the door." And I was like... I felt terrified, but then also there was something that stirred inside of me that was like, "Yes! You have to do this." There was no such thing as single and pregnant curriculum. We just found something that could work. We really winged it, but God was with us. We were really good cheerleaders.

"You're going to be a great mom. You can do this." Three girls showed up. All three got saved. And even as leaders, our lives changed. Then we did it again, three more girls, then eight, then 14, then 21. Other churches started reaching out to us saying, "This is really cool. Will you show us how to do it too? And then in 2012, we started the nonprofit because we realized we need to help people help people, help the church be the church for these girls. And then the rest is history.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's exciting to see churches like Gateway. Pastor Robert Morris down there is a good friend of the ministry.

Amy Ford: Yeah. He's amazing. He's my favorite.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We salute that kind of work. God raise up churches who will do that very thing. If you had a blank sheet of paper in front of you and you said, "Tim, my dream is this," where do you see this all going?

Amy Ford: Oh gosh, for every girl with an unplanned pregnancy to have a church to turn to for help and hope in her community that is within walking distance or driving distance or bus distance. That we're known more for what we're love and we're known more for what we're for than what we're against. That is our hope, and that we make abortion unthinkable through love. Politically, it's always going to go up and down, but through the church, we can make it unthinkable forever.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I'm sitting here looking at you and thinking, what a beautiful thing how you chose life and God took what was they say a mess and turned it into your message.

Amy Ford: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And now look at what God's doing. Go God!

Amy Ford: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Amy, for such a time as this, if people want to learn more about you and the ministry, where can they go?

Amy Ford: Embracegrace.com. Check us out. Also, Embrace Grace Inc on Facebook and Instagram. We have great social media too. And encouragement for moms, if you meet anyone that's single and pregnant, we can help. Just reach out to us and we'll show you how to do it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Amy, I'd like to close this way. Somebody turned the radio up because they got a phone call. They took a test and mom and dad now know about it. They're crying. They're trying to figure out what to do. What do you say to them?

Amy Ford: I want to say that if anyone's listening and is in that situation, that God chose you out of all the women in the whole world to carry this baby. Whether you choose to place for adoption or to parent, that He has equipped you with everything that you need to be able to walk this out. And that you are strong, that you can do this. But with God, you can do all things and to find an Embrace Grace support group near you.

If you go to embracegrace.com, you can put in your zip code and all the groups near you pop up with the churches that have it. We want to walk alongside you and love on you, but you've got this.

Dr. Tim Clinton: He loves her. He loves that baby too, doesn't He? Amy, we just like to have you. On behalf Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the team at Family Talk, so encouraged by the work that God's doing in and through you and the ministry. Keep up a good fight.

Amy Ford: Thank you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Thank you for joining us.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to Amy Ford, the co-founder and president of Embrace Grace. Amy's been talking with our co-host Dr. Tim Clinton here on Family Talk about the church's role in caring for single women facing unplanned pregnancies. Proverbs 31: 8-9 say, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly, defend the rights of the poor and the needy."

The Bible is clear in its instruction that followers of Jesus are responsible for caring for the vulnerable. The young single woman who just found out that she's pregnant and doesn't know what to do is vulnerable to say the least. Women in crisis pregnancies need a safe place to turn, and we, as the church, should be providing that safety and love. And that's why Amy Ford founded Embrace Grace.

To learn more about Amy Ford, her book called *Help Her Be Brave*, and the ministry of Embrace Grace, visit drjamesdobson.org/broadcast or give us a call at (877) 732-6825. Well, that's all the time we have for today. I hope you've been encouraged by today's program and that you'll join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening.

Announcer:

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