



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Hope Heals: Finding Joy in the Midst of Suffering – Part 1

Guest(s): Katherine Wolf

Air Date: April 6, 2022

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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: Have you ever asked the question, "How could a good God allow bad things to happen?" Or maybe you've wondered, "God says in His Word, he wants to bless me? Well, if that's true, why hasn't he given me a child or a spouse? Or why did he allow my son to walk away from the faith? Why is there cancer, disease? Why are there other types of suffering too?" These are all difficult, painful questions to ask. And our guest today here on Family Talk knows a thing or two about difficulty and pain. Her name is Katherine Wolf.

Katherine is a Christian champion of faith. She's a wife, a mother, a communicator, an advocate with a powerful story to tell. She's the author of the book, *Hope Heals: A True Story Of Overwhelming Loss And Overcoming Love*, and also, *Suffer Strong: How To Survive Anything By Redefining Everything*.

Katherine and her husband, Jay, are the hosts of the podcast called *Suffer Strong*. They reside in Atlanta, Georgia with their two sons, James and John. In March of this year, Katherine Wolf spoke at the Mabee Center at the campus of Oral Roberts University. She addressed an arena of over 4,000 ladies gathered at an Extraordinary Women's conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Extraordinary Women's events are annual weekend gatherings for Christian women that are designed for ladies just to get out, come together and be spiritually nourished and refreshed. They include dynamic speakers, music, spiritual devotions, prayer time, worship, and lots and lots of laughter. By the way, to find out more about EWomen as we like to call them, visit ewomen.net.

Now, today on the broadcast we have titled Katherine Wolf's presentation, "Hope Heals: Finding Joy In The Midst Of Suffering." Let's go there right now, on today's edition of Family Talk.

Katherine Wolf: Hi there. Hey Tulsa. I'm so glad to be with you this morning. Good morning to you, I should say. I imagine right about now, you're freaking out. You're like, "Wait, I came here wanting to have some hope and joy and feel better about my life and my story, and there's a girl in a wheelchair on the stage and yikes."

Yeah, well thank you, “but this could make me sad. This could really bum me out. This is really not what I needed over my weekend, a fun getaway, girl time and bummer.”

Well, nothing could be further from the truth, actually, I am hopefully thank you, thank you. I hopefully am not going to bum you out too much. In fact, I hope you'll leave here not bummed out at all. I actually don't want to inspire you either though. It's funny, I have no interest in inspiring your life, in the sense that you are able to separate yourself from me and my story, like you see this speaker on the stage and you might feel inspired by their story, but it's very separate from your life. You know what I mean? Like, here's this testimony of this girl who overcame in the name of Jesus and you're able to remove it from your life and your specifics.

I'm not here for that today. That doesn't get me out bed in the morning, because maybe you'll call on that in the hour that you need it, but I'm more interested in something different. I'm interested in connecting our stories. My specifics are likely very different than yours. Have any of you had a massive brain stem stroke, nearly died, survived and become severely disabled afterwards? Maybe in a crowd this size, there are a few who have, but by and large, probably most of you are not dealing with this specific brand of brokenness.

Years ago, when I first was after the stroke, you'll hear details a minute, but forced into this wheelchair full time, people would say, "Katherine is wheelchair bound." That was a big thing like, "Katherine now bound by the wheelchair." It just never settled well with me, wheelchair bound, because the reality is I'm not. I'm not bound by the wheelchair. The wheelchair is actually an avenue to my freedom. In fact, I am wheelchair-free. Well, thank you, thank you. It's true, that the wheelchair enables me to go where I want to go, to be in the rooms that I want to be in, to do what I want to do. The wheelchair is not confining me. It's actually pushing me forward.

I'm going to sit back down carefully. But as I do, I just want to point out on behalf of our disabled brothers and sisters, that I can stand, many cannot in wheelchairs. I'm one of these that can, I can hobble around a little, carefully, sort of like walking, kind of, kind like dancing. I think this is just so important. I say this in any room I can say this, to have curiosity without assumption about our disabled brothers and sisters. If you know one person with a disability, that's their one story.

I'm going to briefly just overview my story, and then jump into some good meat for you this morning. So, with no further ado, I'm just going to in brief share a little bit about me. My name is Katherine and I grew up in Athens, Georgia, married my college sweetheart in November of 2004. Life was wonderful and easy and we decided to go on this crazy adventure to California from Georgia to Alabama.

We decided to go live really in poverty, but it was awesome, at the beach in Malibu. My husband went to law school at Pepperdine University and life was wonderful and easy. We got plugged into our church and were just loving newlywed life. As sometimes happened accidentally, it did for us, I got pregnant and we had a baby and James Thompson Wolf was born in October of 2007. Those are happy tears, I promise.

After he was born and when that sweet baby was just six months and five days old, I woke up, I felt funny. I didn't know what was going on. I had no medical history, no family history, no indication, anything at all with the matter, no nothing, no symptoms, no warning. Basically I got dizzy and had a massive brain stem stroke by at the end of the day. That brain stem stroke would forever mark my perfectly able bodied, no health problems, had just had a baby, self.

What had happened was an AVM had ruptured. An AVM, which you may have heard of, probably not, it's very rare. That's actually a picture of my x-ray scan in the hospital, which all that blood's not supposed to be there. Basically an AVM is an arterial venous malformation. Basically before I was born, I believe when I was fearfully and wonderfully created in my mother's womb, a collection of blood vessels would malform. They would form incorrectly and then they would grow and grow and grow. So, when I was born, I had a congenital condition I never knew I had, called an AVM in my brain stem.

Basically, it would grow and grow until I was 26 years old and then it would rupture. When it ruptured, it caused the brain stem stroke. So, in order to remove the AVM, my doctor did a 16 hour brain surgery and it was very touch and go. They weren't sure I would live. I actually lost my full blood volume five times. So I bled out, they thought I was dead five times and I just wouldn't die, which is so ...

Thanks, yeah. Thanks, yeah, it's crazy. I know you got some purpose after evidently you died five times, but you know what has been so sweet of the Lord to allow me to open my eyes to? Which I think is so key in all of our stories, to wake up to what God is doing. It took me many years to recognize this, but I want to tell you and really anybody I could talk to and tell this to, that I always thought I was so disabled now because I'm a stroke survivor, which is what you would assume, like I had a stroke, so now I'm really bad off. That's why my face is paralyzed, my hand doesn't work. I can't walk. I can't see well, like there's you guys, but my double vision means there's you guys up there. So, I've always seen two images and I'm deaf in one ear. I'm nearly blind in that eye, but just enough to have really terrible double vision. I just have loads of health problems. I have osteoporosis as a 39 year old. I have arthritis already. I just have lots of really bad, yucky health stuff.

So, I always thought this was because I was a stroke survivor. That's actually not the reason. The reason I am so impaired is because the wise and careful surgeon chose to operate on me and make sacrifices in order that I may live, which is

such a beautiful biblical concept. That there may be sacrifices, there may be losses, there may be things taken away in our stories, but could it possibly be so other things could flourish, so that you could live? So, it says in the book of Job that He wounds, yet He heals, that in the wounding, perhaps healing can come. I know that's not a sentiment that's easily slapped on a bumper sticker the morning after tragedy, that's ludicrous and that's not helpful, no one needs that. No one needs platitudes when the bottom falls out of your life. But I do believe in time, we can pick up the pieces of what's happened and recognize this is what God is uniquely doing in my story. For me, one of those is recognizing that the wise and careful surgeon decided intentionally to make sacrifices that wound me for life.

Now, I don't put God in a box. I may have a full healing next week, I have no idea, but I'm not waiting around for that. I'm not remotely sitting in a corner crying that my face is paralyzed and I can't walk and blah, blah, blah. No, clearly I'm not too embarrassed about my state. I probably wouldn't be speaking to you right now. But instead, I'm very aware that, oh the Lord has done something very intentional here in my story. This is very unique. I can't help but think the same is true for each one of us in our stories of suffering.

So, I really wish this was my attitude when I woke up. I was in a coma for the first two and a half months after the rupture. When I woke up, I was in this crazy, weird new world. I just couldn't figure it out. I'm totally able bodied and I'm fully disabled now and I can't eat food. They fed me through a tube in my stomach and I have all these machines hooked up to me and it was awful. I can't hear, I can't see. I can't feel my face. It was just awful. It was terrible for me physically, but by far the worst pain of it all was sweet baby James, who's now eight and a half months old, and I can't understand why they won't leave him in the hospital with me.

So, my brain, my cognition hasn't fully returned. So in my brain fog, my thinking was, "Surely since I'm his mother, they will leave baby James in the bed with me? I will feed him. I will take care of him. He's my baby. I'm his mom, surely he'll be here with me in the hospital?" It was like Groundhog Day. So, every day they're bringing him to see me and visit mama and then taking him away. It's the stuff of your nightmare to not be able to mother your baby. Oh, that maternal instinct, I think is deeper than so much of our instincts in life, that somehow I deeply, deeply desired to care for my child.

We have a picture of my first Mother's Day and that picture ... is it on the screen yet? That picture is so sad, but so wonderful. I have such a love, hate relationship with it because I mean, it's tragic. My friends dressed up my little baby in a mom onesie and my sweet husband brought him in the room to see me, but it's so sad because I have no memory of that day and that's really awful.

No amount of rejoicing in the Lord now and picking up the pieces of my life will make that not sad. I feel like as Christian women, we have done each other such

a disservice by not acknowledging that there is deep sadness and there can absolutely be wonderful redemption of all different kinds, but it doesn't mean that there is not still a low grade sorrow and sadness in our stories that can be lifelong.

I love the David Crowder song, "That earth has no sorrow that Heaven won't heal," because here's the reality ladies, we're not in Heaven. There is sorrow on Earth. It can be lifelong. It will never, ever not be sad that I could not take care of my baby for almost three years. That's pretty tough stuff. I don't imagine a day this side of Heaven, when that will not be sad to me, that I couldn't take care of my baby. I mean, it's awful.

Yet there is incredible redemption, but I don't know that I should be feeling guilty. Do you know what I mean, that I still feel sad? I feel like in Christian context, if you haven't moved on from your pain at some point, then you're not being a good Christian girl. That's just simply not the case, that we can hold the tension of joy and sorrow together. We can meld those and that is the Christian life. We serve a suffering Savior who Himself endure terrible indignities and there is sorrow and pain in our fallen world. It makes sense. Why are we pretending and throwing platitudes that tell us otherwise?

So anyway, that's my little aside, I guess, about our need as Christian women, to allow room for sorrow that doesn't go away. To say, "I'm never going to get over this, this side of Heaven." Yes, yes, that's right. It's a beautiful thought.

However, and this actually ties into that point. I have gone on to have a second biological child named John. Thank you. We are a family of four now and I'm so grateful. But to bring that point home, even with baby John, I have not experienced full redemption of the sadness of not being able to mother James. I always wanted to say that, it didn't make it okay now that I have a second baby. In your lives, if there is pain that has not been fully redeemed, I think that's how it's supposed to be. It's coming in Heaven, ladies. It's not here necessarily today. Thank you. But I will tell you that baby John has just been a joy and a terror and nearly killed his disabled mother. But I've hung in there and now he's six years old and my older one is 14 and it is really cool to have those big boys in my life now, 14 to six years old. We've got an eight year gap happening, which is pretty crazy, but pretty wonderful.

James is nearly six feet tall, which is pretty insane. And John is six. Do we have a picture of them, guys of mother's day? There we are. There we are in our family camp. Now, as you can see, he's creeping on me, but yeah, life's gone on and that's at our happy place. You'll hear about them at Hope Heal's Camp that some of you have come to, thank you. We've gone on this life. It's a weird life with mama in wheelchair, but we believe that's part of the journey. It's a great life, we can hold the good and the hard together in all of our stories.

I love the truth of Isaiah 45:3. Some of you may know this. It's one of my very favorite passages. It says, "I will give you hidden treasure in the darkness. Riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am God, the God of Israel, the God who summons you by name." I love that deep truth, that if we are in the deep darkness, called to the darkness, we should get some treasure there. Right, ladies? We should grab hold of it. Keep that treasure, cherish it every day for the rest of our lives, right? If you got to go to the darkness, learn the right lessons there and hold tight. Let it inform how you live every day for the rest of your entire life, goodness.

I feel like what I am about to share with you might just be my primary treasure since the stroke. I feel like the Lord has made this truth so abundantly clear to me and it's something I never understood as a little girl. I don't think I heard this very much, but here it is. I made up a word. I'm sure the dictionary is going to call me any day to put this word in, I don't know. But the word is this, goodhard. It's one word. We are living the goodhard life. Those things are not mutually exclusive. No, no, no. I believe they beautifully coexist in our stories and we are all living the goodhard life.

I love the truth of Colossians three. I won't even bother sharing it, for time sake. Look it up. Colossians three, we've got to keep our eyes on Jesus. Not looking down and if we're serious about living the resurrection life in Christ, I am saying it, then we need to act like it. Don't shuffle around, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. No, no, no. Look up. That is where the real action is. Hallelujah.

Roger Marsh:

Incredible truth spoken by today's guest Katherine Wolf here on Family Talk. And that was just the beginning. Make sure you join us again tomorrow for part two, the second half and the uplifting conclusion of Katherine's recent presentation that she delivered at the Extraordinary Women's conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

As you heard during today's broadcast, when Katherine was in her 20s, she suffered a stroke that left her severely disabled. She wrestled with God about her fate for years, but ultimately she realized that God still had a plan for her life. Katherine invented the word, goodhard to describe a unique dynamic that is evident in the life of every believer. As a result of her own extreme suffering and trials, she has come to realize that the good and the hard times can coexist. In our finite human minds that can often be difficult to understand but it's true.

In fact, in John chapter 16, verse 33, Jesus said to his disciples, "In this world, you will have trouble, but take heart. I have overcome the world." Yes, this life is filled with hardship, but we can still have joy and cherish the good in the midst of the hard.

I hope you've been encouraged by Katherine Wolf's words today here on Family Talk. Make sure you join us next time for the conclusion of her presentation. If

you'd like to learn more about Katherine Wolf, her books, or her ministry visit drjamesdobson.org/broadcast.

If you have a prayer request today, won't you give us a call? We have team members available around the clock to take your call and to pray with and for you. Sometimes during a difficult season, the best thing we can do is to ask for prayer. So, don't be shy. Our number is (877) 732-6825. Thanks so much for making Family Talk a part of your day and week. Join us again next time for the conclusion of Katherine Wolf's stirring presentation, which we're calling "Hope Heals: Finding Joy In The Midst Of Suffering." I'm Roger Marsh and may God richly blessed you and yours for the rest of today and always.

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

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hi everyone. This is Dr. Tim Clinton, here for Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. You know the news comes in all kinds of shapes, sizes and formats these days, but how do you cut through the noise and get to the heart of the matters that affect your family? Come to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and sign up for Dr. Dobson's monthly newsletter. You'll find clarity on tough issues, encouragement for your everyday life and trusted principles to help you build strong, healthy connected families. Go to drjamesdobson.org, sign up today. That's drjamesdobson.org.