



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Pray Big Things – Part 1

Guest(s): Julia Jeffress Sadler

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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: Hello and welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh and I truly believe that today's program is going to bless and encourage you. Just a couple of weeks ago at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention, Dr. Tim Clinton sat down with Julia Jeffress Sadler and you're going to hear their conversation today. Julia is the author of the 2019 book called *Pray Big Things: The Surprising Life God Has For You When You're Bold Enough To Ask*. She's also a licensed professional counselor, a reality TV star from TLC's *Rattled* and the Next Gen Director at the 14,000 member First Baptist Church of Dallas. She's a regular conference speaker, radio show guest, and the host of *Unapologetic with Julia Jeffress Sadler*.

Julia's father, Robert Jeffress is the senior pastor of First Baptist Dallas, and a personal friend of Dr. Dobson's. Today, Dr. Clinton and Julia Jeffress Sadler will be discussing what happens when a Christian decides to take God at His word and pray big things. As you'll hear, Julia and her husband, Ryan, created a list of big things to pray for. Soon after committing to this prayer list, they experienced the pain and disappointment of a series of miscarriages. As you probably know, miscarriage is a very common tragedy and research tells us that as many as one in five women between the ages of 15 and 49 cannot even become pregnant in the first place. Julia explains that the grieving process in both of these situations is necessary and crucial. We hope you'll find today's intimate message to be uplifting for you or someone you know. Let's go now to today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Welcome in to Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton the president of the American Association of Christian Counselors and co-host. Julia, welcome to Family Talk.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I know Dr. Dobson would love to be here, wanted to say hello to you and so impressed with what God's doing in and through you.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Oh, thank you. I'm excited to be here. Thanks for having me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Julia, as we get started that big book, *Pray Big Things: The Surprising Life God Has For You When You're Bold Enough To Ask*. That's a tall order, but it's a big message. I think everybody's, we're in a phase right now. It's been tough. People are asking and crying out for God to do something, a lot of people are. But where'd it come from?

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Right. Well, actually it came from no problems going on really at all. My husband and I wanted something more interesting in our lives. The reason that I say that is because I think a lot of times, if you know our story, people get kind of confused about the order. They think that we had a lot of infertility issues and then we started praying big, but the order's very important for our testimony.

It's that we were together on New Year's Eve and we did not want to make another New Year's resolution list. So, God pulled on our heart strings, James 4:2, "You have not because you ask not." And so, we decided to make a list of 20 things we were going to pray until God said no, or until He clearly said yes. And we didn't tell anyone, that was just what we were going to do for the year. And on that list were multiples, three children, for God to do more than anything we could hope or imagine, for our student ministry to catch a love and a vision for evangelism. And we had some different people in our lives struggling with addiction, prayed for their sobriety.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sure.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: And then we started an intense time of persecution and loss and ended up losing three babies in less than about seven months.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Julia, I want to go to that moment. You were over in what, London?

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: England. You and Ryan, and you're at a New Year's Eve service or something.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And God just kind of like steps into your life. And you guys say, "Hey, listen, prayer. It's always been important." You grew up in a pastor's home. You've been a Christian, but prayer often gets confusing to people because I think when we journey through life, we look to the Lord. We know we need Him and we cry out to Him periodically. We get a little confused about prayer because it's like, how do I pray really? Is this selfish, is this wrong, or what have you. But this moment, I just, what dialed that moment up again?

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Well, we were, it was New Year's Eve and I think people feel like they really want a new start. And I think something that happens is we think, well, yeah,

we've already heard about prayer. We've grown up a Christian. We already know all that kind of stuff. And instead, God just really put on our minds and on our hearts, "No, you can trust me. You don't need to look somewhere else. It's in the Bible because it's true." And we just both got this supernatural sense. What if we really just started believing the Bible? What if these Scriptures really are for us? And of course, we believed that, but I think that there's a difference between knowing that the Bible's for you and knowing these Scriptures are true and then actually deciding that now I'm going to claim that, I am going to pray that. I'm going to take God at His word until something happens. And that was just a huge shift in our lives.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Julia, like you, I'm a PK, pastor's kid. My dad, I remember him speaking First Corinthians 2:9, which by the way, is in your book. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God's prepared for those who love him." Man, I want that. Or First Peter 3:12, "The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous. And his ears attend to their prayers." Julia, I remember being, having an experience similar. I was with Larry Crabb. We were in Glen Erie and Larry's a Christian psychologist. You know the name, probably read many of his books.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But we had some one-on-one time. He said he would help be the spiritual director of a lot of the work we were doing if I would meet with him privately and he could pour into my life.

We're staring at each other, this one experience, and I remember him saying to meet Tim, you can imagine the two of us, eyeing each other up and trying to figure out how to move in and out. But he said, "Tim, I think this. I think you don't come to God with a spirit of expectation at all." I want listeners to catch this for a moment. You can grow up as a good kid. You can be praying like crazy and really don't have much expectation on God. Maybe I don't even know how to approach God.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: In this moment, you guys begin to start praying, the wheels start coming off in your life. And Julia, it's a story. You're no stranger to pain and brokenness. Take us into that.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yeah. So it was really interesting because we didn't know, of course, that as this prayer journey started, that it was going to change the course of our life forever. I'm mean everything changed that night. Who I was named after, my dad's mom, I pictured now, everybody... our family in Heaven looking down being like, 'Oh man. They don't know. They don't know what's coming.' We just had no idea that it was going to change everything but we were excited but we didn't know of course what was going to happen. So, we started praying and were going to pray fervently, going to pray very specifically. I talk about in the book

that I learned a lot of times to what you were talking about, we're scared to ask specific prayers because we don't want to be disappointed. And so, we decided God was bigger than that and we were going to have to walk through any disappointment but we could go to Him with our questions and our dreams. So, we started praying.

We did that every day, sometimes multiple times a day and we got pregnant really easily. And we were like, oh, that was easy. We're like, okay, just start checking them off the prayer list. We got that. And we were waiting on purpose. We were in student ministry for 10 years and I was becoming a therapist, which takes forever as everybody knows. And so we were waiting on purpose and then got pregnant easily. And we were like, "Well that was easy. And we're like, this is going to be easy. God just wants to bless us. This is great. We're really doing the right thing here." And then we ended up losing the first baby on a night where I had a hundred girls in my backyard and I was teaching them how God had a legacy for them in that stage in life, not in the future, not one day when they get married, or one day when they were grown up, how God had a purpose for them now.

And that was so surreal, losing, obviously, our first child, but then having a hundred teenage girls that I was getting to pour into. So that was the first loss. And then we got up pregnant again. We're like, okay, that was sad. Of course, but a lot of people experienced that. So we picked ourselves up, got pregnant again. We lost that baby. And that was probably, usually I don't, I'm not talking to someone that has any kind of counseling background. I forget I can actually tell you the truth. So I decided I did not want to feel, did not want to feel. And so just totally gave myself into work because that second one was definitely the worst. And of course, you know, emotions buried alive, never die.

So, I definitely started, I would say getting, it was hard because there was definitely the spiritual side of, "Oh, you're going through spiritual warfare" and I knew that. And so sometimes that would help, like, okay, this is spiritual warfare. Satan's trying to discourage me. You're in a godly marriage, you're in ministry. This is one of those stories. But then I think also sometimes we can just not over spiritualize it that I knew I needed to let myself feel, and I didn't. I knew what I should do and I didn't do it. But we ended up, I remember Ryan and I saying, okay, maybe we're never going to have kids. So what do we know without a doubt we're supposed to do? Without a doubt, if everything's taken away, what do we know we're supposed to do?

We are supposed to witness. We are supposed to tell people about Christ. And so, we ended up launching something called, "Tell the World." And it was encouraging our teenagers to old school street evangelism, downtown Dallas. And we saw 150 people witnessed to by people under 18 in our student ministry. And it was like this incredible, just new start for our student ministry. So we were struggling so much personally but ended up being one of our best years in ministry. And then we lost the last baby. I got pregnant again. And while I was teaching at a women's conference on why God allowed suffering. So it was

just very supernatural. I definitely felt very encouraged by God and very attacked by Satan.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And that's really traumatic.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Honestly.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And no doubt, there's some out there who maybe have turned up the radio and they're saying, "Hey, listen, I'm kind of in one of those dark seasons." And I think when we go through it, we try to white knuckle it and say, it's going to be okay and God's good, but I'm broken.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And Julia, how did you begin to handle that? I know that you're pressing in. My son, Zach often says that in the absence of clarity, there's an invitation to him. Boy, it's hard to go there.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes. For us, because it was confusion going back to what we knew to be true. Like I just said like, okay, if nothing else, if we don't know where we're supposed to work or what our family's supposed to look like, or anything about what the future holds, what do we know without a doubt, that God has called us to go into the world and make disciples. It was really good that I kept teaching during it. So I kept teaching my Bible studies, I kept leading Sunday school. I kept speaking because that made it where I couldn't just fall off. I had to show up every Sunday and still encourage the 18 year olds to open their Bible and go to God with their feelings. And so I think that staying in the practice, spiritual practices, even when I didn't feel like it was really important. But then going more to the counseling answer, I remember one day I was drying my hair and I was thinking about how much I tell teenagers and other people that they just need to tell God how they feel.

Because if you don't, you're going to look up and you won't have read your Bible in a year. You won't have gotten to church. You would've just fallen off and that God can handle our feelings. He's fine. He already knows them anyway. And so I was blow drying my hair. And I said, you know what? I'm really mad at you. I was like, I'm really mad that you've let this happen. And I know that you're good, and I know that there's going to be some big plan, but I'm really mad at you. And it was just amazing because almost instantly, it was just like this wall that had been there was gone because I just told God the truth, and He knew the truth anyway. Of course, you know this but I love this saying, that "Honesty creates intimacy." So just telling Him the truth helped break down those walls and where I could go to Him in a different way.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yep. So many people get lost in that pain piece and they don't come out of it, Julia. You hear what I'm saying?

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: They shut down. They isolate. As the kids would say, they go dark.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: They ghost or whatever they're calling it.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: In this moment, by the way, if you're at that place in your life, or if you've ever been there or, you know someone is going through it, this is where I think praying big things becomes a real gift because you begin to transition. You say, listen, you've got to have two P's. You got to have a plan and you have to have persistence. Let's talk about the plan, the strategy of how do we get into this. What do we need to do in moments like that?

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yeah. So I think staying grounded in truth is absolutely essential. Choose to believe truth regardless of what you see or how you feel, which is very difficult. But I think a lot of times that we know that as Christians, but then the counseling side, of course, is okay, but you can't totally negate your feelings and totally just say they don't matter and that doesn't have anything to do with how I connect with God. So I definitely had to get a plan for how I was going to stay in truth, but also how I was going to stay healthy emotionally. For me, what that meant was I was only going to share with people that I knew had some understanding of counseling and psychology.

Because for me in that place, I was getting a lot of, I don't like, Scripture's so powerful and it can cut through anything and it heals you and everything, but I needed empathy because I knew what the Bible said. I already knew the words.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You grew up in all that.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: But not to negate the power and it's all there and everything. But for me, I was getting too much of, well, there's a plan and well, God's doing something and it won't always be like this. I needed more empathy and more people that were understanding the trauma, which we'll get probably into later, we had a lot of other stuff happened that kind of was, I could only talk to people that understood basically how the brain worked because I was getting way too much bad advice probably.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Because when you're going through dark times, when it's like, God, we can't take anymore, somebody's got to turn this off.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And you're crying out. And I think of maybe some women listening right now who are going through infertility and maybe they've gone through a miscarriage or two, like you, three of them. It's like Hannah crying out in the Scriptures. If you look at that piece out of First Samuel, it's like, wow.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And that's brokenness.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You know that. And that's a cry out to God. In that, you talk about work hard and pray harder.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Don't stop here, press through this thing. That pray as if it all depends on God and work as if it all depends on you. Help us understand that.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes. Oh man. I love that quote. I did not come up with that, but it is a great one. For me, I was coming in contact with a lot of people that were like, "Well, you just need to pray about it. You just need to pray about it." I was like, "I think I need to pray about it too." But for us we also needed to seek out medical help. And people probably feel differently about this. I know people do. For us, there wasn't anything pro-life about continuing to lose babies. And especially when we weren't seeking medical help to not do so. And so there's a line where officially the doctors say, you need to go see somebody. And so that's after you lose three babies. So for us, we were praying that God would heal. We were praying that these miracles would be done.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And you continued to.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes. And we continued to do that. And then God, we believe, used medication to bring about our triplets and for this amazing story to happen. So for us, I get asked all the time about how do you justify fertility treatment and all of that. And I mean, it's not hard for us to, but that's because we had a peace about it in our spirit. We knew things we were okay with. We knew things we weren't okay with. And the Bible says that God wants us to go to Him. This verse is talking about salvation, but whenever we seek God, He's going to answer. He's not trying to hide from us, "you just got to figure it out yourself." And so we went to God with every question.

Dr. Tim Clinton: God uses many ways bring healing.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And direction into our lives. We know that.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes. Well, so it actually really closely to me resemble psychology of how many Christians struggle with psychiatric medicines and how is that okay. And so actually I thought infertility medication, that seemed very similar to me, the struggle that Christians have kind of sometimes with legalism and just different things there. So we actually had really crazy things happen where someone told us a doctor we should see and I was going around the grocery store getting apples. And I was praying. I was like, should I go see this doctor? And I looked down and that doctor was on the face of a magazine in Dallas Magazine. I was like, okay. Not that stuff like that always happens, but the Bible says God's close to the brokenhearted. And I think a lot of us have experienced that, just a unique ways that God ministers to us.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. I believe that His spirit bears witness with our spirit. I think God directs our paths. We get an alignment with Him and say, "God, where are you working?" That's like when Henry Blackaby used to say, get there. Wherever He is working, get there.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Get to that doctor down the street or whatever it is. We're not minimizing the power of God at all. Actually, we're expanding our understanding of how God is working in this world around us. So you also said, don't just pray. And you had a quote by Uncle Ben out of *Spiderman*, "With great power comes great responsibility." And it stopped me when I read through the chapters, that really sunk in. Seek help, guidance, wise counsel. And there's a piece in here that, you're trying to balance out where we get direction from in life. You know that. And so in your journey, what did that mean again for you?

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Well, so I think that the primary way God speaks to me and to all of us is through Scripture. But that's hard if there's not a verse that says "in Matthew, make sure you go see this fertility doctor." Of course, there's not a verse that gives specifics. So, then you go to principles and what are the principles in Scripture? We know that God loves the family. We know that many of us will have kids. We knew that He doesn't want me to become discouraged at the point of us leaving. People leave ministry, people end up broken-hearted. And so, for us, looking at the principles in Scripture and how God's designed the family and what He wants for us to live a life of evangelism, that all went along with, "Okay, then we need to do whatever we can because God's given us this desire for children, then we need to do what needs to happen." And He's free to say no, but we feel like this is in accordance with what He wants for our lives. So, Scripture first, and then, I mean, I always ask my dad everything. We just didn't have any spiritual mentors that thought thing was off about us receiving help after so many losses.

Dr. Tim Clinton: A lot of people sometimes sit back and say, they're waiting on God.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And we understand the Scripture says “Those that wait on the Lord, renew their strength and more.” But I think there are times we use it as a cop out too, to take steps that we know we need to take. Julia, let's keep going because in this people begin to step back and say, hey, wait a second, praying big things. I'm going to keep praying. Help me understand the big things piece here for a moment, because I get the prayer piece. But you putting an expectation on us, pray big things.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes. Well, so I think that's definitely found in scripture. I talk a lot about the story of Joseph and about how God gave-

Dr. Tim Clinton: One of my favorite stories in the Bible.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Just incredible about how God really gave him his dreams as a child, as a teenager. And that's what happened for me. I was a teenager when I really wanted multiples and I was, people were like, that's crazy, but it's true. That's something that God put in my heart, I thought twins. I don't think I've even heard of triplets, but that was something I'd really wanted and called to ministry as a teenager and met my husband as a teenager. I very much connect with Joseph, not because I ended up being the second in command of Egypt, but because just giving those dreams as a child and then struggling. I was called to ministry and then had a very bad eating disorder for a long time. And that's why I went into counseling instead of seminary because I loved counseling and figuring out, oh wow, there's so much here and so much help and so much that Christians don't understand. They can, but we don't have these tools a lot of times. So I think that realizing just that the big prayers, those big dreams that we have a lot of times are from God. And I give different ways to guide of how to find out like, okay, am I just saying, I want to be a millionaire or are you really having a desire for something that God wants to bring to fruition?

Dr. Tim Clinton: That fine line between what some would call prosperity, gospel-type thinking, or God loves righteousness. Does He bless those who are faithful? What happens when He doesn't? They're a lot of questions that continue to surge. Julia, I know we're fighting time here. I just want you to speak to our audience, speak to people who are listening right now. Tomorrow, we're going to come back and talk a lot more. There's some serious questions that need to be answered here. What about suffering? What about unanswered prayers and so much more. That's on the table, but closing thought today about praying big things in the midst of the greatest challenges of your life.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Yes. I just would say that God can be trusted, that He can be trusted with our desires. He can be trusted with our heartaches. He can be trusted with our dreams and we're never going to be disappointed. Whenever we invite God into our dreams, our suffering, our plans, He's faithful. He hasn't failed me yet or anyone else I know. So I know that it's hard, but you can't refuse to give up and go to God with absolutely everything.

Dr. Tim Clinton: After three failed pregnancies, you wind up pregnant again. We're going to talk about that. Wasn't easy. The story's unbelievable. Julia's heart and her emotions are raw in the book. She lays it all out there. But what I love is she holds on to a God that she believes in with everything, who ministers to her heart and by the way, on her husband and this amazing family God's given to them. Julia, it's such a delight to have you today. Thank you for joining us here on Family Talk.

Julia Jeffress Sadler: Thank you for having me.

Roger Marsh: That was Dr. Tim Clinton with his guest, Julia Jeffress Sadler on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We just heard the first half of their conversation on the topic of Julia's book called, *Pray Big Things*. In her book, Julia tells the story of how she and her husband Ryan decided that they were going to take God at His word and pray some big prayers for their lives. Little did they know that after making that commitment to pray, they would enter a time of deep suffering and loss, but God was faithful. Make sure to join us again tomorrow to hear the conclusion of Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with Julia Jeffress Sadler on Family Talk.

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