# Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** This Isn’t the Story I Wanted
**Guest(s):** Nicole Langman
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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute, supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and today on the program, we have a profound topic to discuss that I know every one of our listeners have walked through, and that is the topic of grief. But did you know that grieving is not only reserved for if you lost a friend or a loved one? There's a lot more to grief than common descriptions will often apply. And to help us delve into this subject is Nicole Langman. Nicole is a writer, a speaker, and a social worker in private practice in Ontario, Canada. Her work lives at the intersection of spiritual formation and personal growth. And her heart is to see women radically transformed by the love of Jesus Christ. She's written a fascinating new book that has a title that will certainly get your attention. And that is, *This Isn't the Story I Wanted: Grieving the Life You Lost and Trusting the God Who Stays*. And we have a link for that book up at drjamesdobson.org. There's a lot to get into. So Nicole Langman, welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We're glad to have you here, even though this topic is one that will probably turn a few people sideways before we get to the good news part of it. So thank you for addressing this topic and joining us today here on the program.

Nicole Langman: Thanks so much, Roger. I am delighted to be with you today.

Roger Marsh: Is this a topic for you as a counselor that really kind of, I'll say energizes, I don't want to say lights you up, but I mean, it really energizes you in the sense that you see so many people wrestling with it and you realize there is help, there is hope, but a lot of people just can't find it yet?

Nicole Langman: Yes. And I think that does, it does light me up. Partly because over the years, women, I work predominantly with women, they come through my door and they share a story that is unbelievably heavy, life rearranging, relationship wounds, whatever trauma, historical trauma that they might be carrying into the session. And they don't have words for it. They just know that it's coming with them. And so I have said countless times, my goodness, this sounds to me like you're grieving. And the overwhelming emotional response that continues to happen when women find words for what it is they are carrying, it just... It's just liberating, having a word for it. And then we can do that work because grief

is heavy lifting. It's heavy work. And so until you actually know maybe what it is that you're carrying or what it is that you're doing, I think sometimes we can get lost in just this feeling. And we also spend a lot of time comparing loss. So we figure, how can I be grieving if nobody died? And so there's a confusion there. I think people maybe get hung up on that a little bit. So when we can put a word to it, it can liberate people.

Roger Marsh: You mentioned a phrase, Nicole, that I want you to circle back around to because as a guy who talks for a living, I realize I'm kind of the anomaly in the room. Men don't usually talk about things as much as women do, but you talked about how important it is when a woman goes through a season of grief or an experience of grief that she is able to have words to describe it, to work through it or whatever. Talk about why that's more important for women than men because it sounds like it is.

Nicole Langman: We have a lot of words to use up. And it's interesting that you said that, Roger, because you're right. We have like four times more words to use up in a day. And there's actually therapy in talking it out for us. Some of us are internal processors and we do a lot of our internal work and then we can kind of come to our own conclusions. But for many of us, chatting it out, talking it out is really, really important. And that's where therapy comes in as well, is that sometimes chatting it out with someone who's outside of the situation is especially important because our friends can maybe not invite the words as clearly or as freely as maybe a trained professional or someone outside of the circle can.

But using our words is actually a therapeutic thing that God's given us. God has given us the ability to talk things through. He's created emotion. He's given us a wide spectrum of emotions. And the good, the bad, and the ugly emotions are available to us. So as we learn to chat that out, there's actually a retraining of our brain that happens from a psychology perspective. And I'm not a psychologist. I'm not a brain expert necessarily but I can definitely say that we know that we can create new neural pathways. The more we talk about something, the neural pathways get kind of embedded, so to speak, maybe not so clinical. So what we want to be doing as an overcomer is we want to be allowing ourselves to hold the grief, to hold the loss, to hold the experience that we're feeling, talk it out. And also that whole kind of redirection can help with some of the healing work that needs to be done. And that's other kinds of conversation, the positive, more healing focused conversations.

Roger Marsh: Nicole, you've kind of alluded to this, but I'd like to get down into some specifics here for just a moment, because oftentimes when you say grief, the first thing you think of is someone died. Maybe it's a spouse, maybe it's a parent, maybe it's a child. I mean, God forbid, but I realize that that's where we typically, grief means the grieving widow, the grieving widower, that type of thing. In your book, *This Isn't the Story I Wanted*, though, you kind of expand the definition a little bit. And I'm sure it's a real eye-opener to a lot of the women that you counsel when they discover that grief is not just about loved ones, but it's about

any kind of loss. Take us through some of those different types of losses and kind of maybe give an example of some of those so we can kind of get a better framework for what you're talking about here.

Nicole Langman: Yeah. So grief is that ache. It's that internal ache. It's the emotional response we have to broken dreams and life rearranging losses. And so nobody has to die in order for there to be grief. We've often long held death as the high watermark of loss and measured all other losses up against it. And that's actually not fair or accurate. We grieve a lot of things that are unrelated to death and the story as the book shows up in my life is it was several years ago my husband of almost 20 years walked away from our relationship and that launched me into the deepest grief valley of my life and it was through that valley that I realized that it was kind of cricket. So people didn't really know how to do that. Camps were built and people took sides and stories were generated, but nobody knew really what to do. Fast forward several years and just a few years ago, my precious mom passed of cancer and the absolute outpouring of love that were given to our family was, I think we know what to do when someone dies, but we don't necessarily know what to do when someone's spouse has walked away or there's infidelity or there's a disability in the family or there is mental health or a new diagnosis. I don't know that we necessarily know how to handle someone who's living through ongoing experiences of infertility or who had a traumatic birth experience or struggling in the adoption area or their children are estranged from them or they're feeling disconnected or their relationships have broken down or they've experienced a really traumatic life rearranging move that they've had to go through for reasons of financial breakdown. So it's really important that we allow people, that we hold space for people in those areas.

Roger Marsh: You have a quote in your book that I really loved, and I'd love you to kind of drill down on a little bit, where you write, “grief is a placeholder for what was. We do not grieve what we do not love.” Talk about why that is so important for people to kind of give themselves permission to say, look, okay, maybe it was a house to you, but it was a home to me, or whatever it was, as we're going through the grieving process.

Nicole Langman: Yes. Grief is a sacred honoring. And I think that that is, God's given us the ability to love. He has built that into us. He is love. We are built to love. And within that, the risk of love is loss. And I really find that actually that grief is a sacred action of love. I was saying to my dad recently. I said you know this is how you can continue to love mom even past death is you can carry the pain of missing her. You can carry the grief for her well because you've in a sense saved her from having to do this. It's a way that you can honor what was. It's an honoring. It's a sacred act of honoring. We don't grieve what we don't love. We don't grieve what we don't miss, what wasn't important.

Roger Marsh: Talk about the fact that there are some griefs, that some grief does arise because of situational circumstances, and other is like the more long-term like you're talking about. I mean, there's got to be a difference, I would imagine, between what you describe as temporary disappointment. and something that

is an actual grief moment that really needs to be acknowledged and then processed.

Nicole Langman: Yeah, the big D and the little D disappointments. Some of them are little disappointments that they don't really grab a foothold. They'll sit with us maybe for a day or a week or a month or a few months. There's a disappointment that that didn't happen. I pitch a book to a publisher and they don't pick it up and that's disappointing. I don't need to grieve that necessarily. That's not a grief-worthy disappointment. It is what it is. We face several disappointments. You know, I was disappointed yesterday when I pulled into Starbucks and someone, you know, the person ahead of me had 20 items that they were waiting for. I was disappointed I was going to be late for my meeting. But, you know, those disappointments, that's not what we're talking about here. It's the big D, life rearranging disappointments that sink in and actually can impact our mental health and they can impact how we see the world and they can impact how we view relationships and God and et cetera, because they tend to linger long and they can impact our filter, how we filter our lives. And so those are the ones that we need to do. some of the heavy lifting around is noticing the impact of that big D disappointment in our lives. And that the longer that lingers in us, the deeper it can find its home in us and then we need to do heavier lifting.

Roger Marsh: You have a chapter in the book called “Pit” where you talk about Joseph's story and the fact that, you know, a lot of times we will go right from Joseph and his brothers and the coat of many colors to Joseph welcomes them all back in Pharaoh's court. And we jump right through there. We forget there's two decades, you know, where Joseph is in prison and he's being sold and he's being accused. Talk about why Joseph's story helps us understand maybe a pit of grief that we find ourselves in in that moment.

Nicole Langman: Yeah, the thing that leaps out of the Bible for me is that God was with Joseph in the pit. And it wasn't a rescue. It was not a rescue right away. So first of all, we only rescue what we value. We know that Jesus Himself was the rescue, right? And so he comes and he rescues. But oftentimes, God visits us in the pit. He spends time with us in the pit. He's close to the brokenhearted. And so the rescue wasn't immediate. I mean, Joseph had to go from the pit to Potiphar's house, to prison before he got to the palace. And again, 20 years passed between the two. And so it's very important for us to remember that God is outside of our timeline. It's not…our timeline doesn't look like God's timeline. And so for Joseph in that pit, those were long hours, moments, days. He was terrified. God was with him in the pit. And then he gets to Potiphar's house and all that happens there. And he's the victim of, you know, lies and deception and all the things. And where was God in that? God was with Joseph in that. And all of this was a growth pattern towards what God had for him. He didn't necessarily know that at the time. He's forgotten by the baker in the prison. You know, what happened there? He's been through so much. God was working him out. He's working it out, growing him up for the palace. And so we must trust God's timing in that all things, He's working all things together for those of us who love Him. And so even in the pit that we're in, God is with us in it and he

has not put down His pen and He's going to be moving us through whatever that looks like. It might not look like the palace. My marriage did not reconcile. I am happily married to my high school sweetheart. It's a beautiful story I love to tell. I'm remarried back to this in another marriage. with this incredible man, but God did not reconcile my marriage. He did not rescue me from that pit, but he did something more beautiful than I could have ever imagined. He was working it out all the way along, just like he did with Joseph.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, that's encouraging. And as someone who has also been in that club as well, you find that you're going through that season and you're like, wait, 25 years of what the heck? And then it just kind of blows up. And then God has something better for you on the other end. And you begin to realize, okay, but I still have to grieve what I went through. And I love the fact that when people will talk about the so-called five stages of grief, you've actually added a step. And it talks about gratitude. Talk about why gratitude is so important because I know there are a lot of people who will say, I don't like what I'm going through right now, Nicole. This isn't a lot of fun. Why should I be grateful for it? Talk about why we should.

Nicole Langman: Yeah, I think gratitude is the is the answer to a lot of the struggles that we have. This tension between I'm in pain and struggles are happening, and I don't know what to be grateful for. And gratitude says, yes, this is true. And also. So it's not a, I don't have to be necessarily grateful for the pain or grateful for the loss or the, you know, the trauma that I'm facing. But I can have both in the same place. There is a tension we, you know, gratitude and sorrow can coexist in the same place. And so we want to… where we fix our mess is a cognitive behavior therapy idea is that where we fix our focus, where we fix our mind is going to inform how we feel. So if I'm focused on the pain and the trauma and the loss and all this happened, I'm going to miss a lot of other things that are going on.

I tell a story in my book around sitting on a beach in Mexico and I was enjoying the sunrise with my devotions and God had painted this beautiful sunrise for me, oranges and purples and pinks. It was just absolutely beautiful. And I look down the beach and there's a storm happening over the resorts down the beach. I look back and I'm still looking at the sunrise, the storm, they exist at the same time. The same is true at the same time. And where we put our focus is going to inform how we feel. And so when I'm looking for things to be grateful for, because God is always working, there's always something to be grateful for. If I'm looking for things to be grateful for, they're everywhere. We just have to be intentional about where we put our focus.

Roger Marsh: Talk about what it means to really work through grief when you know it's going to unearth certain feelings of maybe bitterness that could keep you from properly grieving and moving forward the way God wants you to.

Nicole Langman: Yeah, we have a long history of trying to stay away from the discomfort, from uncomfortable feelings. And so if I can just like, especially high achievers amongst us who are just like, oh, I'm just going to go on with my thing. I'm going

to. But meanwhile, there's, you know, I often say like grief will follow us into our life. It will find us. It will, you know, will show up. And there are hateful things that happen in our lives, right? I hate divorce. God hates divorce. I hate that that that you know, that there was infidelity and et cetera in my life. I hate cancer. You know, there are things that we can actively say that are hateful. But we have to be so careful because we can't heal and hate at the same time. I can't wish ill on someone and trust that God is going to heal me and move me into His purpose and calling in my life. So, so much of the work is around forgiveness. And I struggle with that big word because that is a hard one to just say out there, have you thought about forgiveness? We struggle with that because there's been an injustice. Something very bad has happened. It's hard to forgive when we have been so terribly wounded. But in every sense, I really do believe that forgiveness is a gateway to healing. And so much of that work is around, I don't forgive necessarily to let someone else off the hook. I forgive because I love Jesus and I know it hurts Him when I don't. And I want to honor Him and our relationship. So I can forgive someone without being in buddy-buddy relationship with them. The forgiveness is a way that I can do my own healing. And that's about letting go of some of that hateful feelings. I'll be honest, I spun in rage fantasies and revenge fantasies, but it's hard to hold those rage and revenge fantasies and also heal and follow Jesus into His plan and His assignment in my life. So I had to choose. I had to choose. And that's sometimes a difficult choice when the world and some of the injustice can pull us back into that other piece.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, I'm glad you said that, Nicole, because we've all been there. I mean, whether we want to be honest about it or not, we've all been there in terms of saying, this person did me wrong and I want something to happen now. Vengeance is mine, Lord. You know, just let me help you out here. And God doesn't work like that. But another quote from your book where you say, look, “unforgiveness is not only a barrier to peace, it's an emotional burden that compounds grief.” And I thought, wow, boy, that, I mean, grief is a heavy enough load to carry. But then when you throw unforgiveness on top of it, you might think I'm working through something here and I just have to process this and let me be angry for a couple more years and I'll be okay. And you're thinking, and what you're telling us is, no, you really have to lay that at the foot of the cross. That's the only place that currency will spend. And then you can move forward. And that's got to be a huge moment of clarity and even healing for people who are processing all this.

Nicole Langman: Definitely. And I think the thing that we sometimes forget is that forgiveness and healing is a process. Just like grief isn't linear and our experience with healing isn't linear, it has to be, there has to be grace for ourselves around our process. There are times that we will try to maybe steal back some of the things that we have put down at the cross, right? I don't know about you, but I've kind of like inched my way, trying to be like the cloak of darkness to steal some things back from the foot of the cross. Like, oh, right, right. Like, I think it's okay to have that honest conversation with God. This is hard to turn this over, God. I don't actually know. what this looks like, those face-on-the-floor prayers to Him.

He hears them, and He wants to walk us through that. It's not linear. It's going to be sometimes you take something back, and you're going to feel like you've gone backwards a little bit. Just continue to turn that over. I don't know what to do with this, Lord. Here it is again. Here it is again. Here it is again. It's a process, and it's going to take time. This is a marathon, not a sprint.

Roger Marsh: Amen to that. Talk to that person, Nicole who is just now realizing, I didn't realize there's been as much grief in my life as there really has been, but I want to take some practical steps to acknowledge it, to grieve through it. I don't want to get stuck on, God, why is this happening to me? Why am I stuck in this pit? I want to move forward, but I don't want to blow over something that I could be missing a lesson in. What are some first steps to take?

Nicole Langman: It's a great question. The first step is just naming it, absolutely saying, okay, this is what I'm noticing in myself. I'm grieving this. I'm grieving this in my relationship. I'm grieving that this isn't the way that I wanted it to look. I'm grieving. And I would really encourage someone to even write that down. There's a lot of therapy in just cursive writing. Type it out from us. But if you could just write it out, it's really helpful. Just to revisit back to Joseph, 20 years after when he sees his brothers, he goes away and he weeps. This is an important part of the grief process. So allow yourself the emotional outlet of weeping for what has been lost. It's okay to grieve the thing you didn't choose or the story you didn't want or the sorrow that might be lingering. Unresolved anger can turn into depression. And in marriages, the thing that I see the most, and you've probably talked about this so much, Roger, in your program, is that bitterness and resentment is poison in relationship. And so if we're not doing the healing work, And by the way, we love to find a spot to locate blame and that will absolutely impact and exacerbate the bitterness and the resentment. But if we do the healing work, that will quiet and heal some of that bitterness and resentment because the healing work and the grief work can take the edge off some of those other sharp areas because unresolved grief can be sharp in our marriages. And it can show up. as we can be more irritable, combative, argumentative, and certainly unforgiving. So I think that the healing work in our marriage is really, really important. To address that and to do the grief work with somebody outside of your marriage is even really important.

Roger Marsh: That's very helpful. And I think, too, about the situation we find ourselves in culturally right now, where you have a generation of young people who are very, very aware of their emotional well-being. Mental health days are very common. They really want to be healthy and they want to be good spouses and parents to their own children. And yet they're looking at what happened to them. And whereas generations past just said, well, that was my dad. That was my grandpa. That was my whatever. You just kind of, you know, suck it up and keep going. The generation, it seems like that put more of themselves into their kids when the kids were younger are now kind of on the receiving end of, hey, you didn't do this for me. And there's just all sorts of miscommunication going on. What do you say to the parent who is looking at their adult child who says, hey, you know what? I need a minute or a month, or maybe I need a few years

away from you while I'm processing stuff. And they want to try to rebuild, and they realize there's some heartbreak. Maybe some of it was what they brought into it. Maybe it's the way it's being perceived. But they're maybe making things worse by trying to chase after their adult children instead of letting them grieve whatever it is they're grieving? That's a really giant question to try to answer in a couple of minutes. But what are some ways that we as adults who are looking at our kids of that certain age saying, I don't know what I did wrong, but I want to try to make things right?

Nicole Langman: Yeah. You know, I think the first place to start is prayer and on your knees, on your face with a pastoral team. I love the idea of having a prayer team for your family. There's so much estrangement right now. We are seeing this so much. We are an emotionally saturated generation that is in my opinion emotions are a terrible compass and so there's a lot of that and so we see this great divide because there's a lot of knowledge without a lot of wisdom and so we struggle with that a little bit right and that knowledge without wisdom is… this can be really damaging and so what we're seeing is we're seeing a lot of this disconnect between parents and their children because there is a very huge cultural divide obviously but there is this kind of like emotion like you shared earlier emotional, the emotional management is different. I will always start with prayer.

Also, I would also encourage parents to respect the boundaries of your children, your adult children, and pray for them from a distance. If every once in a while you want to send them a note, to not take your hands off them from a distance is okay. But I would really encourage the parents to allow yourself to respect the boundaries. We want to, I've often heard, we're only as well as our most unwell child. And if we are in conflict or there's a disconnect, our hearts are broken, we need to be praying about it. But we also need to be praying from a distance because too much pressure on them does cause them to kind of like maybe back off even more. So that would be my initial, depending on the situation. I don't know the situation necessarily, but to be prayerful and to have a team of people who can pray for your family. Here's the other thing. God lives through this type of disconnection with His kids all the time. He understands as a good parent what it feels like to have His kids turn their backs on Him. He knows what it's like. And I think we can find so much comfort and compassion and just remembering that He's aligned with us and He understands what we're going through. And so reading His Word, listening to His voice, being in prayer with Him continually around where can I find reconciliation? What do I need to own that's mine to own? And what can I let not be mine just because it's been placed on my shoulders? Just because someone's upset at me doesn't mean I've done something wrong. It's something to kind of be humbly looking at our own, at what we can own and then not owning what isn't ours.

Roger Marsh: Nicole Langman has been our guest today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Her brand new book is called, *This Isn't the Story I Wanted*. And we have a link for the book up at drjamestobson.org. Nicole, thank you for your work that you've done, your transparency and vulnerability with dealing with the grief that you've experienced. But I think you're going to help a lot of people, whether

they are dealing with the life that didn't turn out the way they wanted to, or just plans, hopes, goals, expectations, whatever they are. are legitimate sources of grief. And we appreciate you giving us a primer for dealing with that. Thanks so much for being with us today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family. Talk.

Nicole Langman: Thank you so much, Roger. What a treat.

Roger Marsh: You know, grief doesn't always follow a funeral. Sometimes we grieve a relationship or a broken dream. Simply the life that we thought we would have and as Nicole Langman has reminded us today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, acknowledging that loss can be an important step toward healing. By the way, Nicole's new book is called *This Isn't the Story I Wanted*. And you can find that along with today's conversation at drjamesdobson.org. If it's easier, just go to jdfi.org. Those links are one and the same.

Also, an announcement here about a special opportunity for you if you're a pastor, a church staff member, or a lay leader, and how you can help bring *The Chosen* to your church absolutely free. Season 6, Episode 1 will soon be streaming on Prime Video, but you can bring it to your congregation prior to that release date at no cost to your church. To learn how, go to drjamesdobson.org, look for the link for *The Chosen*, and click onto it right there. That's drjamesdobson.org, and look for The Chosen link.

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