



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Overcoming the Shame of the Past – Part 1

Guest(s): Paul and Marliyn Hontz

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: No matter how the effects of sin break us, or leave us damaged, God can redeem us, and take away the humiliation that sin brings. Welcome to Family Talk with your host, psychologist, and best-selling author, Dr. James Dobson. I'm Roger Marsh. On today's program, you're going to hear a replay of an interview Dr. Dobson recorded with Marilyn Hontz as she shared her story about being abused as a child. She tells how the sins of her father, and others made her feel ashamed of herself, but how God lifted that burden off of her life so that she could live freely. Now, before we listen to today's program, the content covered in it may not be suitable for young children, so listener discretion is advised. Now, let's begin with part one of overcoming the shame of the past right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you are a private individual Marilyn, and you don't often talk about yourself, but I want to start with your early home life Marilyn, and especially talk about your father who was in fact a minister, wasn't he?

Marilyn Hontz: Yes. And I think that he just kind of, well, I don't think he had a hard time emotionally relating to me, and to his other two children, to my siblings, and just very, very sad that he came away in life with so much emotional baggage in his own life that he had never gotten fixed, never worked on it. And so what he ended up doing is passing along his baggage for his children to carry.

Dr. James Dobson: Now you were kind of a caboose. You came along when your older sister was 20 years old, and so your mother was kind of going through all this again, but your dad just couldn't seem to play the role that a father ought to play. He apparently knew what he ought to be doing. He could not do it, could he?

Marilyn Hontz: No, and that has often puzzled me. I think deep down my father probably really did love me, but he was not able to share, or to show that love to any of his children. In fact, I think there's something within all of us, especially as daughters, where you want that daddy connection, and it just wasn't there.

Dr. James Dobson: You tell a story in the book about waking up in the middle of the night when you were four years old, and you were frightened, and you went to your parents' bedroom.

Marilyn Hontz: I did, and of course I'm crying, and I'm saying I'm scared, and my dad, he did not like it when I cried, and that was a real problem for him. And so I remember him getting out of bed, and taking me down the hallway, and taking me into the bathroom, and getting the soap, and washing my mouth out with soap, not for bad words, but for crying, and I couldn't understand why I couldn't share my fears with my daddy, and then feel protected, and so over, and over, and over my mouth was washed out with soap.

Dr. James Dobson: What did that do to you emotionally?

Marilyn Hontz: What that sent me into was more of a performance thing where I wanted to please him so much. I wanted to be this good little girl, even though I cried, and was termed crybaby, I wanted to please him because I wanted him to love me. I wanted him to put his arms around me. I wanted him to say to me, "Marilyn, I love you. You're my little princess."

Dr. James Dobson: There was also a story about your riding along in the car when you were five, I believe?

Marilyn Hontz: Right. We were on a vacation, and I got into one of my crying times. I wanted to sit up front by my mom at that point, and my dad just got sick of my crying, and finally pulled the car over to the side of the road, and it was on a desert road, a very deserted desert road. And I remember him getting out of the car, and I'm thinking, "I wonder what's going on." And he comes over to my side of the car, opens my car door, and he says to me, "Get out." Well, I obediently got out, and I'm standing there on the road, and he gets my little suitcase, and puts it alongside the road by me, and all of a sudden I see him going, and getting back into the car, and starting off down the road. And I can still remember to this day watching the car getting smaller, and smaller, and smaller down the road until I couldn't see it anymore.

Dr. James Dobson: You didn't know that he'd ever come back?

Marilyn Hontz: No, I didn't. And at that point I didn't realize it, but what I was feeling, obviously I was very frightened, but feelings of abandonment is what was really starting to take root there. And it's interesting, because as much as I remember being left there, and seeing the car going down the road, I never remember my dad coming back, and picking me up. It's interesting that I don't remember that.

Dr. James Dobson: He obviously did, but you don't recall it.

Marilyn Hontz: He did. In fact, I have many people say, well, what happened? He did come back to me. I don't know for how long I stood there, but obviously he did come back, because I'm here today, but I do not remember him picking me back up.

Dr. James Dobson: Marilyn, what do you think was going on in his heart, and mind at that time? He didn't deliberately abuse you, did he?

Marilyn Hontz: I would like to think, no, and I agree with that. My husband, and I have talked many times. We've had five children, we've had children crying in the car on trips, and stuff, but we never felt compelled to pull the car over, and put them out on the road. Now we've maybe pulled over, and had to talk to them, but not put them on the road. I think that was my dad's coping skills, and I was to learn later why crying was such a horrible thing for him.

Dr. James Dobson: That is a very, very important connection. Explain that.

Marilyn Hontz: Okay. Right before my father died, I probably had one of the best conversations with him that I've ever had before, and he said, "I want to tell you some things." He was in a nursing home at that point, and he said, "Did I tell you that my father died when I was nine?" And he had shared a little bit of that. And I said, "But tell me more dad." And he said, "Well, my aunt came to pick me up from school, and when she told me that my dad died, I started crying." And he said, "She slapped me on the face, and said, 'Quit crying. You're not supposed to cry.'" And what happened, what my dad internalized from that situation was that crying was a weakness, and he didn't want to see that in me, and he felt like if he could control my crying, that would make him good, too. That would be a help to him as well.

Dr. James Dobson: Your crying was an insult to him. It was like he had failed.

Marilyn Hontz: Yes, exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, I've thought about that many times, and I heard that story a number of years ago, and it just occurred to me that when a little child is so vulnerable, when he, or she is just young, and is going through that kind of abuse, or that kind of rejection, or the lack of affirmation, our hearts go out to that child. But when that individual grows up under that source of pain, and those memories, we don't realize that it plays out as an adult as well, and makes them, or at least can influence the way they relate to their own children. And we don't have any compassion, or sympathy for a person who's been through that after he is grown. You understand what I'm trying to say?

Marilyn Hontz: Yes, I do.

Dr. James Dobson: And I'm sure your father bore the scars that early experience, and it came out in a relationship with him. I'm not excusing what he did by any means, but it still has an origin somewhere. And does that help you forgive him today?

Marilyn Hontz:

Yes. Oh, definitely it does. It always helps when you can see where another person's coming from, and the Lord through the years has given me a great compassion, and love for my father, too, and that has helped. I think if I can go on, and share that story again in a different way is, I got to the point when I forgave my dad for doing that to me. But years later, that memory came back to me in a very fresh, powerful way. Paul, and I were driving along at some roads in California, and I saw some of the same signs it was to Barstow, California, and that was the road that I got left off on a deserted desert road. And when I saw those signs, I thought, "Oh, man, I just felt so bad again about that memory", and here I'd already forgiven my dad, and I said, "Paul, what father in their right mind, or parent in their right mind would leave a child off along the side of the road?"

And I was really struggling, and I had not been angry about that before. I'd been very sad, and very hurt by it, but not angry. And I was feeling feelings of anger for the first time, and I'm thinking "Now, where's this coming from? Because I've forgiven him." But I found that the Lord wanted to do a deeper healing in that memory. And I remember we got to the place where we were staying, and I went into a room, and I said, "Lord, just show me what do I need to learn from this memory because it's really painful for me right now, and I don't know why." And the Lord said to me, "Marilyn, I want you to look at that memory again, and what do you see?" And I said, "Well, I see this little girl, her back's to me, and she's standing alongside of the road, and her suitcase is next to her."

And the Lord said to me very silent, just that still small voice of the Lord said, "I want you to look again." And I looked again at that memory, and this time I saw the little girl with her back to me in the little suitcase there, but I saw the backside of the Lord Jesus standing there holding my right hand. And I have to tell you, it was very powerful because what the Lord spoke to my heart was "Marilyn, I was there all the time with you in that situation that happened." And He said, "It's so easy for people to get life in God mixed up, but I did not leave you. Your father did, but I was with you, and I was crying with you." I'll tell you, that was a powerful, a deep healing of that memory, and it just gives me more compassion for what my dad did. It doesn't explain it, but it doesn't hurt like it did. It was a beautiful healing from the Lord.

Dr. James Dobson:

You probably remember the book, *Mommie Dearest*, who was about Joan Crawford, but this is not a book that could have been called *Daddy Dearest*. This is not a book of anger, and recollection of terrible things from the hand of your father. This is really a book on how you came to terms with that, and how you began to get over the pain, and some of those memories that you had, and how other people can do the same. And that's why you call it *Shame Lifter*.

Marilyn Hontz:

Right. Well, you see, I was dealing though, but I didn't realize it at the time. I was really dealing with shame in my life from things that had happened to me when I was younger. In fact, my father, he would do things like, let's say I needed money for a piano lesson. Well, then he'd pull out his wallet, and say, "This is my last five." Well, after you hear that so many times, you get the

message that you're a financial burden. Well, I took that message, and internalized it. "Ooh, I'm a financial burden to my dad", or I would be going over to someone's home, and he would say to me in King James Bible version "Marilyn, remember to not stay long because people are going to get weary of you." And he would say, "Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor's house lest they grow weary of thee."

And I still remember that, because it was quoted to me so often. Well, that sent another message to me, "Oh, I'm going to be a burden to people if I stay too long." I mean, there was message after message that I took, and I didn't realize at the time that those messages can turn into shame. And so that's really what this book is about is those lies that we believe about ourselves. And even though my dad after a while wasn't even around, I kept those same messages going. So, I'm feeling like, "Oh, I'm going to be a burden to this person." Or my dad was always telling me, "Don't be a follower, be a leader." Well, then I'm always thinking, "Okay, I'm not good enough. I'm not adequate to be what he wants me to be." And you take those into adulthood.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that is a product of a low self-esteem, someone who has a very damaged image of themselves. Describe for us what you thought of yourself when you were in your twenties. What was that like if you'd have sat down to write the I am. What would've been on that page?

Marilyn Hontz: I am inadequate. I am, in some respects, worthless. I'm not good enough to be a pastor's wife because my dad was always saying to me, "If you want to be a pastor's wife, then you're going to need to do this, and that." And it was all about performance, and I could not live up to that performance level.

Dr. James Dobson: Marilyn, those experiences, and we've just, you've given a couple of examples of it, but that was a daily kind of rejection that you felt, and it went on for many years. It could have made you angry, and it could have also, as I just said a minute ago, made you abusive of your own children. In a wonderful way, it drew you to the Lord.

Marilyn Hontz: It did.

Dr. James Dobson: You became more tender to him. And in fact, you, and Shirley are prayer partners, and you love the Lord with all your heart. How do you explain that? Was there a point at where you had to say, "What am I going to do with this? This is a reality. It's here. I experienced it, but I can either be bitter, or I can be better." Did you ever come to a point like that?

Marilyn Hontz: I did. My dad for as much as he was very emotionally aloof in my life. My mother was the exact opposite, very nurturing, very loving. And so I just so related to her, and wanted to be like her. She had a great love for God, and I wanted to be a pastor's wife because of her. And it was just kind of funny because my dad being a pastor, and not liking how he treated me, but still

wanting to be a pastor's wife because of my mom. Well, like I said, I just so loved her. And then when I was 14, I found out that my mom was dying of cancer. And the night before she died, she came home from the hospital just to spend some time with us. And as she was spending alone time with me, she said to me, "Honey, I need to tell you that my disease isn't going to heal."

And she couldn't even say cancer at that point. She died of breast cancer. And I remember throwing myself on her, and her just wrapping her arms around me, and then just snuggled into bed with her. And I said, "Why, why? Why doesn't Jesus heal you? I don't understand this. I need you, mom. I just can't live with dad. I need you. And why would He take you? And you're teaching Bible studies." I'm telling you all the things that she does. And she let me talk. And finally she said, honey, "I don't know, but I do want you to know that the Lord has assured me that you are going to be okay." And she said, "I also want to tell you that I'd asked if I could live. I asked the Lord if I could live until you got married, and until you had children."

But she said, "That's not going to happen. But I want you to know that Marilyn, I've prayed for your future husband. I've prayed for your future children. And while I'll never hold them in my arms, I have held them in the arms of prayer." And boy, I tell you, she taught me a great lesson on prayer that night, even though I didn't know it, seeds were really being planted. Well, the next morning we had to take her back to the hospital. The next morning we got the call, and saying that she had passed away. And I remember just being so devastated. I went outside, and I looked up at the sky, and we lived in California then. And I said to God, "God, if you're real, you're going to have to be like a mother to me, because I don't understand a father's love. I don't have that, but I know how much my mother loved me."

And the point I'm getting to at this point is that day of standing out there outside, I was at a crossroads, Dr. Dobson, where I could have chosen to be very bitter, and angry at God, which even though I didn't understand why he had taken her, and I was very hurt with the Lord, I think it was through his grace, and probably through my mother's prayers that I made the conscious decision that I was going to go his way, that I was going to give God a chance no matter how my dad treated me, that I wanted to give the Lord a chance. And I was desperate. I was desperate for God. And there was also that part of me still that wanted to be this good little girl that pleased. And so I know some of that entered into it, but just by his grace. And he began to show me then through the years, and it wasn't until I was 30 that I saw how much bitterness that I had allowed to grow in my life, but at least the Lord kept me pointed toward Him, which I'm very grateful.

Dr. James Dobson: Talk a little more about your mother because she was a great role model, and-

Marilyn Hontz: She was.

Dr. James Dobson: I've heard about her from your sister, and she must have been some kind of woman.

Marilyn Hontz: Yes, she was, and I knew I was so loved by her. It's such a great feeling to know when you're loved by someone like that unconditionally. But she started early. She would even show me the clouds. We'd go outside, and she'd say, "What picture do you see in the clouds? Where do you see God working around you? And look at nature." And I remember saying to her, "Mom, why are the birds always waking me up in the morning?" And she said, "Oh, honey, that's because they're praising the Lord. They get up early, and start praising the Lord, so when they wake you up next time, you just start praising the Lord with them." She would spend Saturdays with me in a Bible workbook teaching me, and this was not a boring thing. I mean, I loved it, and she made Jesus just so come to life for me.

She would write notes every day in my lunch at school, a sweet note, she prayed with me before I went to school. She was just there for me, and it wasn't just for me. Other people loved her too. And I remember Dale Evans Rogers, Roy Rogers's wife that many times I come home from school, and there she was sitting with my mom talking. My mom had such a beautiful counseling type of just friendship with so many people. They dearly loved her.

Dr. James Dobson: You were 14 years old when your mother was diagnosed with cancer, and she had been an anchor for you. She had held you steady when your father was rejecting you, and what a difficult time, right in early adolescence to lose that one source of stability in your life, that must have been unbelievably difficult for you.

Marilyn Hontz: It was. It was very hard, and that's why I felt like my whole world shattered, and I knew what was going to happen. I knew I was going to be living with my dad, and wondering, how is this ever going to work? I will say this, though, after my mom died, and my dad, oh, I was at school one day, and he had a lady come in, and took all of my mom's things except for maybe some things that were still stashed away in cupboards that the lady didn't see, but everything was gone except for a cupboard that held her journals, her prayer journals, or her journals where she had read Scripture, and then had written of what the word spoke to her about. And I'll tell you, those journals at that time were such a precious gift from her, and it was something that really kept me going.

In fact, I just got out a journal two weeks ago, and she's writing about worry, and I hadn't read this particular journal injury before, and she said, "I was riding in the car with my friends on freeway in California", and she said "Eleanor was driving", and she said, "My friend Pinky was sitting in the front seat, and she's saying, 'Oh, watch out for that car. Oh, look out over there. Oh, watch out!' Just worrying, worrying, worrying, worrying. Finally, Eleanor, the driver pulls the car over, and says, 'Okay, now we are going to have a moment of worry for a little bit.'" Well, my mom goes on to say in her journal, she said, "The Christian has no reason to worry. It's the person who doesn't know Jesus doesn't know that He

will take care of him. They're the ones that are allowed to worry." But you see, she left me so much. She left me like a spiritual inheritance, and I have just many of her journals.

Dr. James Dobson: And now when she died, did she still have that sense of peace?

Marilyn Hontz: She did. And it's like I said already, she mentioned about "Marilyn, you're going to be okay. I know that, and as hard as it's going to be, I know you're going to be all right." I also, that night when we took her back to the hospital, I remember having a very special time with her. Her face was so peaceful, and she just, even through the pain, just held onto my hand, and kissed me goodbye, and loved me through that. She had said to my sister a few days before that, she said, "I have shown you how to live the Christian life, and now I want to show you how to die as a Christian." And she really did.

Roger Marsh: Truly a remarkable testimony from Marilyn Hontz today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, I'm Roger Marsh, and now there's more of this conversation featuring Marilyn Hontz, and Dr. Dobson. And on tomorrow's edition of Family Talk, you'll hear Paul Hontz, Marilyn's husband of 51 years, join in on the conversation as well. By the way, Dr. Dobson mentioned the book that Marilyn has written about her experience. The book is called *Shame Lifter: Replacing Your Fears and Tears With Forgiveness, Truth and Hope*. We have a link for the book up at our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And while you're there, be sure you also share this program with a friend who may need this kind of encouragement. You can do so through our website, drjamesdobson.org/familytalk, or by finding us on the Family Talk app. Now, the relationship between a parent, and a child is very, very precious, but especially between mothers, and daughters, and fathers, and daughters.

That point was illustrated so powerfully during today's broadcast. And as you listen to Marilyn Hontz talk about what she learned from her parents, you have to wonder what it's like for young girls today who are growing up in a culture that is throwing all sorts of confusing signals at them. I think about my granddaughters ages 14, three, and eight months, and they're coming up in a world that's totally different from where their parents were raised. Dr. Dobson has written some timeless principles about bringing up girls. He did so in his landmark book with that same title, and we've added a few new pieces to the puzzle to incorporate some of the realities of living in 2024. Dr. Owen Strachan, the senior director of the Dobson Culture Center, has added those pieces, and we've put them all together in a 10-day email series that you can access absolutely free.

Just go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk, or look for the button on our landing page at drjamesdobson.org. Click the link for the Bringing Up Girls 10 day email series. Give us your name, and email address, and then we'll start sending you a different word of encouragement from the *Bringing Up Girls* curriculum each, and every day for 10 consecutive days. Again, Bringing Up Girls, the free 10 day email series is yours when you go online to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk, and

click the button for Bringing Up Girls. You can also access that information when you call our resource center at (877) 732-6825. That's (877) 732-6825. And thanks so much for remembering that Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk is a listener supported broadcast outreach. We rely on your prayers, and your faithful financial support to keep producing these programs each, and every day. You can give a gift online through our secure website at drjamesdobson.org. You can give a gift over the phone when you call 877-732-6825, or write to us at Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk Post Office Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening, and be sure to join us again next time for the continuation, and the conclusion of Dr. James Dobson's powerful conversation with author, and pastor's wife, Marilyn Hontz, discussing overcoming the shame of the past. That's coming your way right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

Announcer:

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