



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Learning to Embrace Brokenness

Guest(s): Lon Solomon

Air Date: August 16, 2024

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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 ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Brokenness has many different meanings. It can refer to something that is damaged or some deep emotional pain or feeling crushed spiritually. Brokenness is a part of life that we don't want to experience. No one looks forward to those heartbreaking phone calls or really eagerly awaits an unexpected tragedy. But we will oftentimes wonder when brokenness does happen, why does God allow an unthinkable circumstance or event to take place? Even through those spirit-crushing moments, we must recognize that God is always with us, always by our side. Today's program here on Family Talk is a classic broadcast recorded several years ago on this topic of brokenness, and our guest is Pastor Lon Solomon. Lon is the founder of Lon Solomon Ministries and hosts the 30-minute weekly radio broadcast called *So What?* that can be heard nationwide.

In 1980, Lon became the senior pastor of McLean Bible Church where he remained until 2017. For four years, he served on former president George W. Bush's committee on intellectual disabilities. Lon Solomon is the author of the book called *Brokenness: How God Redeems Pain and Suffering*, and also *The 23rd Psalm for the 21st Century*. Lon and his wife Brenda have been married for 50 years and have four grown children and eight grandchildren. Today, Pastor Lon Solomon will define brokenness and he'll explain why we question God when bad things happen. He'll also share how God has done great works through his daughter Jill, who was born with different needs. Here now is Dr. James Dobson's conversation with Pastor Lon Solomon right now on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Our guest has written a book called *Brokenness*. He is Lon Solomon. He's the senior pastor of McLean Bible Church in the Virginia suburbs in Washington, D.C., where more than 10,000 people attend each weekend. He also serves on the board of Jews for Jesus and was appointed by President George W. Bush to serve as a member of the President's committee on people with intellectual disabilities. Lon, you have written a book called *Brokenness*, just simply brokenness because as a pastor you have dealt with many broken people and

there was a time in your life when you and Brenda, your wife were broken as well. What led you to get into this very difficult subject?

Lon Solomon:

As a pastor, of course, you always have people coming in your office saying, "Why is this happening to me? Trying to live for the Lord. I think we're doing everything as right as we know how. There's no open sin in our life. We're not doing anything to deserve God's discipline or judgment, and yet this horrible thing has happened to us. And why would God do this to us?" I get that question all the time. So years ago as a new pastor and a young pastor, I started trying to do some biblical exploration and say, what's the answer to that question?

And I came up with a few of the ideas that lie at the heart of this book, but really what made this book a reality was that 12 years ago, God sent a little girl into my life named Jill, who as you know, Dr. Dobson is severely mentally disabled. We still changed diapers at 12 years old. And she'd go outside in the cold and would freeze to death, not even know she needed to come in and put a coat on. And the 12 years that Brenda and I have been through that experience now ourselves asking some of those same questions, Lord, I'm a pastor, the best of my knowledge, I'm doing it the way I'm supposed to do it here, why in the world would you do this to us, really produced the answers in the book called *Brokenness*.

Dr. James Dobson:

I want to come back to that story and that illustration, but define brokenness. This is not just depression, although depression can be pretty difficult too, and this is not just despair. *Brokenness* means you really are at the end of your rope. You're really at the point where you just feel like you can't go on anymore. Is there more to it than that? How would you define it?

Lon Solomon:

Well, brokenness is a spiritual process. I mean, despair, depression, these are human processes, but brokenness is a spiritual process where God uses all of that, the pain, the heartache, the suffering to produce a spiritual result in our life that's good and positive and redeeming. The whole idea of the book is that suffering has a redeeming purpose in God's plan for our lives if we'll just let God work this through. E.M. Bounds, *The Power of Prayer*, he made this quote, I think this really really sums up the problem if I could read it. He said, "Men are God's method. The church is looking for better methods. God is looking for better men. What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more novel methods but men whom the Holy Spirit can use. The Holy Ghost does not come on machinery but on men. He does not anoint plans, he anoints men."

We live in a very method-driven world today. We have methods for everything from breathing in childbirth to how to beat the house in blackjack and it has affected our Christian community. We are very methods-driven as a church. Let some church come up with a great program and suddenly they've got a huge line of people who want to take it and copy it. But you know what's interesting, Dr. Dobson? In the Bible, God has very little to say about methods. If you go to

the Bible to construct a methodology for much of anything in the New Testament, you won't find it. What you will find is God talking about the quality and the character and the depth of the people that He wants leading His church. And the whole idea of the book of *Brokenness* is that to make a man or a woman of God, that God can really use, brokenness has always been a key component to getting men and women to that point. And without that process, it's really very difficult to get to the place God can use us in a mighty way.

Dr. James Dobson: You mentioned methods. I've noticed that Jesus in His healing rarely used the same approach. On one occasion He spoke a word, and on another, He touched the person, and in another, He reached down and got some dirt out of the street and spit in it and made mud out of it and put that on the blind eyes. It was always something different. So He was revealing that it's not the method, it is the faith and it is the touch of the master.

Lon Solomon: When I went to seminary, I left with the impression that if you know the Bible well and you go through the wheel illustration, prayer, witnessing, fellowship, that you'd be a powerful servant of Christ. And I had to learn something. And that is that being a powerful servant of Christ doesn't have a thing to do with that, it has to do with the ability of the Holy Spirit to flow through your life in an unhindered way. Jesus talked about this in the Bible. He said in John 12, "If a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone. But if it does die and crack open, then it produces much fruit." And the whole idea of that is that there's life inside that seed, but without cracking that hard outer shell, it can't get out.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's apply this to my introduction, the things that I said. They're about the person who's listening to us that's really going through it, and let's role-play together. I come into your office and I say, Pastor Solomon, I know that you've said that brokenness is a biblical concept, but I'm dying inside. I don't feel God's presence and I don't know why He's allowed me to go through this difficulty. I came out of the doctor's office reeling with the news that I have cancer of the esophagus and I'm in great difficulty. I may not survive. What in the world is God doing here? Why does He have to do this to me to get me to obey Him? I'll obey Him. What is going on here?

Lon Solomon: Well, the first thing I think you would always have to say to somebody biblically is we need to do a good inventory. Let's make sure there's not something we're doing that's sinful and wrong and offensive. Hebrews 12, where the Lord needs to discipline us. I think that's always the first thing to check out. But assuming that's true that there is nothing like that, then I think we have to say, God's out to do something grand in your life. I know you can't see it right now, but He's really out to do something marvelous in your life. He's out to bring you to the place where the only real source of trust and confidence in your life is Christ alone, where the only thing you've got and the only thing you're relying on is Christ alone. So He's stripping all this other stuff away. You've got to trust Him and you got to stick with Him through the process.

I say in the book, everybody wants the product, nobody wants the process. Everybody wants to be a major league ball player, nobody wants to go through the off-the-field discipline it takes to get there. And in the spiritual life, everybody wants God to use their life, but most of us don't want the process it takes to get there. And if you look in the Bible now, let me just give you some Bible characters. I mean, think of Moses, David, Joseph, Job, Peter, all of these people, and even down through church history, whether it's Hudson Taylor or Moody or Fanny Crosby, these folks all went through intense periods of suffering, pain, loss before they emerged as the man or the woman that God shook the world with.

And see, that's not being taught much today in modern Christian circles. And so what happens is people make a prayer when they come to Christ. They say, "Lord, I really want you to use me. God, use my life, make a difference through me." Then God says, "Okay, I'm going to answer that prayer. I'm going to take you through a brokenness experience so I can really use you." But our problem is because often we don't understand what's happening, we don't realize God's trying to answer our prayer and it takes believing the promises of God Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's go back to the birth of your daughter. Was that your first child?

Lon Solomon: Our fourth.

Dr. James Dobson: Fourth child. And the doctor came in and told you that she was mentally retarded or did you not know it then?

Lon Solomon: No, what happened was she started having seizures at three months old and they got worse and worse and eventually completely out of control. She's probably had 5 or 6,000 grand mals in her life and continues to. Less now. But the level of mental retardation and brain injury that occurred has just been profound. The promise of God I was referring to is of course Romans 8:28, "All things worked together for good to those who love the Lord." Brenda and I struggled in those early years. We felt like we were-

Dr. James Dobson: A lot of tears?

Lon Solomon: We felt like we were at the bottom of this big black hole and there was just no place to go. And we kept saying, "Lord, how can anything good come out of this? Anything good?" But you know Dr. Dobson, the truth is you only have two choices. You either trust God or doubt God. That's it. And we just made the decision-

Dr. James Dobson: There's no other alternative.

Lon Solomon: There's nothing else there.

Dr. James Dobson: You let Him go, there's no other plan.

Lon Solomon: And we just said, "Even though this is as hard as anything we've ever faced, we are going to trust God." I don't want to imply that was always easy, there were some days we hung on by our fingertips, but we said, "We know God redeems pain. We know God has a purpose here. We don't know what it is, but we're going to trust Him to use this somehow." And what came out of that was a deeper understanding of what God was really trying to do in our lives. He was trying to bring us to ground zero where Jesus was all we had. And when you get there, you realize Jesus is all you need, and suddenly God can then start rebuilding your life now and really using you for His glory because He stripped everything else away and the spirit can flow. And it took us years to really begin to see the positive side.

Dr. James Dobson: And the other positive aspect to this is that from it has come a ministry at McLean Bible Church to those who are disabled or handicapped in one way or another or mentally disabled. You have one of the greatest outreaches to those in that kind of need and their families that I've ever seen. And it sort of came out of this, did it not?

Lon Solomon: No, it totally came out of this. That's one of the many wonderful things that came out of this. But if I could be a little bit transparent here. When I first came to McLean Bible Church, my goal was to build a big church. Now, it was for maybe of some good reasons, but for a lot of bad reasons. A lot of it was about me. A lot of it was about the prestige and the notoriety and the public acclaim of leading a big church. And I admit that now. And God never-

Dr. James Dobson: You're not alone in that, by the way.

Lon Solomon: Well, God never really honored that very much. After 10 or 12 years, we were still just putting along. And then he sent Jill in my life. She so shattered my life and my wife's life, I mean shattered beyond what I could even describe in words that after a while I didn't care anymore about how big the church got. I didn't care anymore about how many people came, but all of a sudden it started becoming more about Christ and a lot less about me. And the fascinating thing is that all of a sudden people started coming. It's not that we did a thing different. We didn't do anything different. I preached the same way and people just started flocking in. And what I really feel happened is God... I was a lot like Moses, God had to break a bunch of stuff in me before He could trust me and use me.

You know what? If you were to say to me now, let's go back 12 years and I'll give you a choice Lon. You can have a normal healthy daughter and McLean Bible Church and the work of God will continue just like it did then putting along or you can have Jill and what's happened since then with all the ministry. Take a choice. That would be a very hard choice, but I would like to hope that I would

make the right choice, which would be to say, God, send me Jill just the way she was because-

Dr. James Dobson: Especially because you are convinced that it was not a mistake that she was born.

Lon Solomon: Of course, it wasn't.

Dr. James Dobson: That was God's gift to you.

Lon Solomon: It was. And God needed to break me. He needed to break me before He could use me.

Dr. James Dobson: I don't like being broken.

Lon Solomon: Well, nobody does.

Dr. James Dobson: That's uncomfortable.

Lon Solomon: I don't think Moses liked it.

Dr. James Dobson: It is difficult.

Lon Solomon: I don't think Peter liked it after he denied the Lord three times. Nobody likes it. That's what we said. The process, nobody wants the process. But you know what? The product now, I'm a better man because of this. I believe I'm a better pastor, a better husband, and father. So even though I would never want to go through it again, humanly speaking, I would not want to go back to where I was. And this is what the book's about. It's about the fact of encouraging people who are going through the tough times like you said, Dr. Dobson, that there really is redeeming value here. If we'll just let God do what He needs to do, we'll come out on the other side useful to God and intimate with God in a way that only the doorway of brokenness can get us into.

Dr. James Dobson: So often instead though there's that pushback against God, there's that, I call it the betrayal barrier where you feel God has let you down and you're angry at Him and stay angry with Him for years. He can't work through that, when you don't go with it and let Him do what He would do.

Lon Solomon: And you know why people don't go with it? Because they don't understand it. If we would teach this and explain it to people more, if I'd have been able to say 12 years ago, "Okay, I understand what God's doing here. I don't like it, but I understand what He's trying to do to me. I'm going to let Him do it." But if you don't understand, you either get angry or you fall into false guilt where you start saying, "What's wrong with me? Maybe I'm not even really a believer. Maybe I'm doing something..." And you just cycle down, as you said, into depression and discouragement. A lot of it's just lack of information.

I might add. I don't believe God always redeems everything on this side of the grave. People have asked me when they've read or heard about this, they say, "Well, yeah, but what about Jill? It's great God did all this for you and for your church, but what about this poor little girl who's had to be, in their mind, God's pawn in all of this? How is that fair to her?" Well, my answer is God doesn't settle everything on this side. And I believe on the other side because Jill has been willing to live the life that God gave her, God's going to settle up with her on the other side.

Dr. James Dobson: I believe that.

Lon Solomon: And that there are going to be a lot of people who are going to be glad they served Jill on this side when we get to the other side. And God never broke anybody with success and He's trying to answer our prayer. And so often because we don't understand it, we end up being our own worst enemy. And the other thing I think we forget is that God's grace is there in these moments when we need it. You don't get dying grace until you're dying. You don't get bad neighbor grace until you got one. You don't get getting fired grace until you get your pink slip. And I think what happens is a lot of times we look forward and we think about what could happen and we get paralyzed with fear because we're looking at the situation, but the grace isn't there yet.

Even though this has been the toughest thing in my life, I just have to say the grace of God was there when we needed it. I mean it wasn't easy, but 12 years later, we're all still standing and all still walking with Christ. And when God decides to break you, He sends brokenness grace to be there for you, and it's really okay. This whole idea that a lot of people we really don't understand what God's doing and that makes the problem worse. That's really why I wrote the book because I think the book explains what's often happening, how it's going to happen, how to go through it, what's going to happen on the other side that's going to make this worth it.

I mean, I wish I had known all of that when we started. It would've made our whole experience make a lot more sense and would've made it easier for us to pray and work our way and trust God through it. And that's really why I wrote the book is for people out there who are saying, "What in the world is going on and I don't get it, and this is horrible." I want the book to bring some perspective to people so they go, "Well, it's still hard, but at least I understand what God's trying to do to me."

Dr. James Dobson: The tendency in a moment like that is to think God's lost control. This shouldn't have happened. Why did He allow this to happen? He's not paying attention or He's gone or He doesn't love me or He doesn't have the power I thought He did or He's out to get me or I've sinned or something-

Lon Solomon: And nothing could be farther from the truth. He has total control and knows exactly what He's doing.

Dr. James Dobson: The title of the book is *Brokenness* by Pastor Lon Solomon. This grew out of your own pastoral experience and your own personal experience.

Lon Solomon: That's right. The whole idea at the end of this is to challenge us as followers of Christ to aspire for higher ground. The wonderful hymn Higher Ground. But I'm so afraid that we've fallen into the murky shadowlands of Churchianity that we're failing to challenge followers of Christ to really aspire to higher ground in their walk with Christ. The price is worth it. Let's aspire for higher ground to really let Christ walk with us in intimacy and reality and not just live our life at 50%.

Dr. James Dobson: Would it be accurate to say brokenness comes to everybody sooner or later?

Lon Solomon: No, I don't think so, Dr. Dobson, because I think you got to want it. You got to ask God and tell him you're a candidate. And most of us do that when we say, Lord, use me. We don't realize what we're really asking for.

Dr. James Dobson: Despair will come at one point or another.

Lon Solomon: Trouble, heartaches, but don't forget, getting trouble to brokenness involves a willingness on our part to let God have his way in our life. And it's that level of surrender and saying, "Lord, I don't know what you're doing, but whatever you need to do, just do it." That's what enables God to turn trouble into brokenness.

Dr. James Dobson: Pastor Lon Solomon, great friend, thank you for being back with us today.

Lon Solomon: Thanks for the privilege of letting me come.

Dr. James Dobson: We will drop in on you there at McLean Bible Church one of these days. The Lord is blessing it and great things are happening, and I thank you for your love for the Lord.

Lon Solomon: Thank you, Dr. Dobson.

Roger Marsh: It certainly can be difficult to let God have His way in our lives, especially when tough times happen, but we must trust Him in all things and in every situation. It's our hope that you have been uplifted by Dr. James Dobson's conversation with Pastor Lon Solomon today here on Family Talk. And if you'd like to learn more about Pastor Solomon's ministry and his book entitled *Brokenness*, simply visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

When evil rears its ugly head, sometimes it's natural to struggle with its presence, and the suffering that happens in our lives. We try to justify a natural disaster or to understand a senseless killing or just look at the overall unfairness in life, and it's very difficult to do. Well, to bring a little understanding to this issue, we encourage you to get a copy of Dr. James Dobson's book called *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. This book is a tremendous resource to strengthen

your faith in the face of trials and heartache. Now, we'll be happy to send you a copy of *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. It's our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. So go online to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and follow the prompts. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. You can also make your donation over the phone when you call 877-732-6825 or write to us at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip code, 80949.

Now, if you've been looking at the news or on social media recently, you know this election season is going to be very contentious and also very important for the future of our nation. Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we believe that we as Christians need to make our voices heard at the polls. Visit the Dobson Culture Center to look at current cultural issues with a biblical worldview. You can sign up for our free weekly newsletter called "Lighting Up Culture" when you're there. Just click on the culture center tab at the top of our homepage at drjamesdobson.org. The future of America depends on your participation this November 5th. So pray, be engaged, and cast your vote. I'm Roger Marsh, may God richly bless you and your family as you grow stronger in your relationship with Him. Have a blessed and peaceful weekend, and be sure to join us again Monday right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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