



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Forgiving What You Can't Forget – Part 1

Guest(s): Lysa TerKeurst

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Dr. 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: Hi, this is Roger Marsh, your staff announcer here at the James Dobson Family Institute. Before we begin today's program, I want to share with you why now is a great time to partner with our ministry. From now until December 31st, every dollar we receive will be doubled for greater impact. So, if you're able, I hope you'll stand with us financially heading into 2021.

You can pledge your support online by going to drjamesdobson.org. That's D-R-jamesdobson.-O-R-G. You can also make a donation over the phone when you call 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Thanks so much for giving, and praying for Dr. Dobson and this ministry.

Welcome friends, to today's program. Right now, we are going to revisit another program that made our 2020 best-of-broadcast list. Hope you enjoy it.

Dr. Dobson: Well, welcome everyone to Family Talk, which is a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm James Dobson, and I think we're going to be talking about a subject today that might hit pretty close to where you live. Most of us have been wounded or insulted or rejected at one time or another by someone that we thought we could trust. That's just the way it is. It often involves a person very close to us, such as a mother or a father, or a son or daughter, or perhaps a husband or a wife. In fact, the closer we are to the offender, the more devastating it is to be hurt or wounded or rejected. Unless you learn to deal with that experience, the result often is bitterness and anger that can last for a lifetime. I'll bet some of you who are listening right now are thinking, "Yeah, that's me." If you've experienced that kind of pain, our program today is designed for you. I hope, and we just prayed that you will find it helpful.

Our guest today is Lysa TerKeurst, who has an organization called Proverbs 31, which seeks to lead women into a deeper relationship with Jesus. She is a much loved author who has sold more than 6 million books. We're going to talk about two of them today. The first came out in 2018 and is titled *It's Not Supposed to*

Be This Way. The subtitle is *Finding Unexpected Strength When Disappointments Leave You Shattered*. A more recent book on a similar subject is *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*. What a great title that is. We're going to talk about those two books together. Lysa not only writes about painful experiences in others, but she has lived some of them herself. In fact, the books seemed to me to be autobiographical in nature, and we'll probably find that out in a minute or two. Lysa is going to be joining us by telephone. I say to you, Lysa, it's an honor to have you with us.

Lysa TerKeurst: Well, thank you. It's such an honor to be with you today Dr. Dobson.

Dr. Dobson: Let me jump right into it. I want to start with this question. Your book, *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*, was a national bestseller for 18 weeks and has sold so far 900,000 copies. It is very obvious that you hit a raw nerve there. Summarize that book for us. What isn't supposed to be that way?

Lysa TerKeurst: Well, I think most of us have an expectation of how our life is going to go and we love to run into the future and dream up the way things are going to look. But then when we actually arrive to that place and our experience falls way below what our expectation was, the fertile ground that is in between our expectations and our experiences is disappointment. Disappointment can really grow a lot of skepticism, a lot of cynicism, frustration, maybe even anger. I think the heartbreak that can come from that, when the devastation or the disappointment is in our human relationships, is pretty big. That's what happened to me. I have put a lot of emphasis on treasuring my family and honoring God and doing all that I felt like I could do to protect my marriage. Then, we got two-and-a-half decades in, and our five kids were grown, and when my last child packed her things to move out, so did my husband. I was just absolutely caught off guard and heartbroken.

Dr. Dobson: Lysa, I want to know a whole lot more about that as we go along, but let me ask you this, you are speaking now to thousands upon thousands of women. When they come out to hear you speak, and then they talk to you at break time or halftime, or whenever it is, do you find most of them have been heartbroken at one time or another?

Lysa TerKeurst: Unfortunately, yes. There's just a lot of heartbreak. Even if their story isn't the same as mine, part of my story was that I discovered my husband was being unfaithful, and that's not the reason that everyone goes through heartbreak and hardship in relationships and in marriages. But unfortunately, I do think that the enemy is on an all-out assault against the family.

Dr. Dobson: Satan absolutely hates the institution of marriage. But in addition to that, we human beings are very vulnerable emotionally, I think women much more than men, and most of us bump our heads on the same old rock.

Lysa TerKeurst: Yeah, and I think when hurt sits unattended so long in the human heart, it turns into versions of hate. Then it just is a spiraled, compounding effect. I think the devastation runs deep, and I think we are living the fruit of a lot of unattended to hurt right now, when we can just turn on the news and see, it seems like the whole world is epically offended by everything. There are a lot of wrongs and there are a lot of injustices. But God has also given us this beautiful plan to tend to the hurt in our heart.

Dr. Dobson: Yes.

Lysa TerKeurst: That's really what drives me to tell my story. It's not fun to tell this story. I really applaud my husband for being brave enough to want to see God take some of the painful things that we've walked through and use it for His good. But I'm passionate about this. My family's passionate about this, not because we're eager to expose the most painful things that we've been through, but because we're so eager to help other people.

Dr. Dobson: Well, you have told me that we can get personal here, because you're going to open your story for people to hear so they can understand where you've been. You've indicated in your book, that there was infidelity in your marriage. How did you survive that?

Lysa TerKeurst: It was a long journey, and there were some addictions involved that complicated things. My husband did not live in our home for over two-and-a-half years. For the purpose of our interview, we're having to clip right along here, but I don't want to brush over that fact. Because two-and-a-half years of going to bed by myself, it's devastating. There's so many people that are there right now, and it's so hard.

Dr. Dobson: How did you find out about what he was doing?

Lysa TerKeurst: Well, it was a series of finding small things. I think as a Christian wife, I kept trying to override what I was seeing, because I wanted to believe the best. I wanted to speak words of life and encouragement. All of those are great principles in a marriage, but there also has to be a time where we're really honest with what we see. So I eventually confronted him and, and that's how I found out. It was really devastating.

Dr. Dobson: How close were you all to divorce during that time?

Lysa TerKeurst: Well, after 18 months of doing a lot of intensive counseling, things imploded again. There were five different times I thought we were about to cross the finish line and renew our vows and then things would fall apart again. After 18 months, I finally went to my husband and I just said, "I can love you and I can forgive you, but I will not share you." I drew a very hard line and actually your book, it's an oldie, but it's such a goodie, *Love Must Be Tough*, that book helped me so much.

I really followed the advice that you gave in that book, and I wrote a letter of just setting my husband free. I'm telling you, I would recommend that book to every single person going through something so hard. Because you unpacked so beautifully, just the reality of the human dynamic. It was never going to work if I just begged him to stay. The only thing that ever worked is when I set him free and I released him to face the full weight of the consequences of his choices. Eventually, and it was a long season of eventually, but eventually he came back and he did the hard work, the humble work of winning my heart back, and the slow work of putting our marriage back together.

Dr. Dobson: I've written 71 books now, and I think I've received more mail from *Love Must Be Tough*, which you mentioned, than any of my other books. It relates to marriages that are in the process of breaking up. I have had literally thousands of people who have written me, most of them women, but some of them men, who have said, "You saved my marriage." It's very gratifying to me, because there are some principles that determine whether or not a marriage that's breaking up can be saved, or whether it is doomed. Nearly always in a marriage that's in that kind of trouble, there's one partner who wants out and is looking for a way to escape. In fact, the infidelity may be an expression of that desire to get away, to escape. The other partner is absolutely desperate, because he or she is losing something that they can't contemplate life without.

It is begging and pleading and promising and trying to do anything, trying to get the partner to go to counseling, which is usually rejected. They'll do anything to preserve the marriage. That response is called appeasement. Appeasement almost never works. The more you grovel, the more you drive the other person away. It's strange the way that works, but the principle is in love, you want what she can't have and you tend not to want what you're stuck with. So when one person builds a cage around the other, it makes them desperate to get away. I think that might be relevant to your situation.

Lysa TerKeurst: That's exactly what I did. I will say, I also had the support of a counselor that helped me navigate some of the difficulties. Because when you draw a boundary like that, and I do think in difficult relationships, boundaries are very important, they're not cruel, they're important because a boundary doesn't shove that other person away. For me, a boundary helps hold me together. My children deserved a mom that didn't completely fall apart and fall into the pit of despair. I had to be firm. I could be loving, but you know, Dr. Dobson, I found when I was giving too much grace, I was really enabling him.

Dr. Dobson: That's right.

Lysa TerKeurst: Eventually, that grace became disgusting to him. I think what God really started to show me is that I could be his wife, but I could not be his savior.

Dr. Dobson: I'm so glad that you found a counselor who understood the principles that I'm talking about and knew what to do, because he gave you great advice. The one who wants out has a totally different perspective. It goes from, "How do I get

away," to, "Do I really want to leave?" It changes the whole perspective. The best way to save a marriage that is in this kind of trouble is to let go. It's to say in effect that, "You married me of your own free will, and now you say you want to go. If you do, it will hurt me, because I love you. I married you for life. But you are free to go, if that's your desire."

Go on with your story now, Lysa, because it's relevant to so many people who are listening to us.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Well, I remember I went to one of my counseling sessions after I had had the hard, "Love Must Be Tough" conversation with my husband. That season was so hard. But I will say, when I had that conversation and I followed your advice in that, and I turned Art over to his choices, that was the first time he checked himself into a treatment center and he stayed and he completed the program, because it was of his own doing. Every other time, I had checked him in. I had begged him to stay. I had tried to really prevent him from hitting rock bottom, because I was so scared of all the consequences that would be unleashed, that would deeply affect not only me, but also my children. That's what's so complicated in situations like this.

So, Art was away at treatment, and I went and sat in front of my counselor. I was exhausted. It had been an 18-month battle at that point. Though we'd held what we were facing in a private manner for very long, it was no longer possible to keep it private, because things were leaking out. So I had to make a public statement and I was exhausted. I was afraid. I was alone. I went and sat in front of my counselor, and I remember he looked at me and he said, "Do you want to heal, Lysa?" I said, "I really do. I want to heal." And he said, "Then today's a good day to start working on forgiveness." I thought, "Are you crazy? That's not possible. I don't know how this situation's going to turn out. I'm not done hurting yet. Art hasn't said he's sorry. I don't even know that forgiveness is possible, because I can't even have a conversation with him now."

Everything I was saying, I was attaching my ability to heal on choices that Art may or may not ever make. My counselor really helped me understand that I deserved to stop suffering because of what had been done. The only way to sever the source of suffering was to unhitch my ability to heal from his choices. I had to start understanding that forgiveness was as much for my heart as anyone else's. It was a great first step of healing. But I couldn't start by just saying like, "Okay, what happened to me doesn't matter. I'll forgive." Because what happened to me did matter. So, my counselor said, "Let's don't start with forgiveness. Let's start with your pain." He had me write, on three-by-five cards, all the ways that I had been so deeply wounded. When I finished writing those cards, my counselor looked at me and he said, "Lysa, what you have faced is so hard. I want to acknowledge that. I believe you."

Dr. Dobson, I guess I want to say that to someone who's listening today. I'm so sorry for what's been done to you. What happened, it was hurtful and it matters. Your pain is real, and if no one has ever dared to bear witness to your

pain, I'll do that for you today, and I'm so sorry. Friend, you do deserve to stop suffering because of what someone else has done to you.

It was at that point, my counselor looked at me and said, "Okay, Lysa. Now, just go card by card by card, and just say, 'I forgive Art for this pain.'" Then he told me, "Add this statement at the end, 'And whatever my feelings will not yet allow for, the blood of Jesus will surely cover it.'"

Because you see, sometimes our hurt feelings are the very last things that want to sign on to Holy instructions. If we have a right understanding of forgiveness, we start to see that we don't have to muster up the determination to forgive. Forgiveness is not based on our determination. Forgiveness is based on our cooperation with what God has already done. As God's forgiveness flows to us, we simply cooperate with letting it flow through us to other people. That's how I made the decision to forgive.

I've also come to understand, Dr. Dobson, that forgiveness is both a decision and it's a process. I don't know if you've ever had this situation happen in your life, but have you ever made the decision to forgive, and you really did have a marked moment of forgiveness where you said, "I forgave," but then a week later, six months later, a year later, you get triggered by being reminded of the impact, the emotional cost that that had on you? I don't know, have you ever gotten that, where it's like, "Okay, I made the decision forgive, but now I'm angry again"?

Dr. Dobson: Of course, because the memories are still there.

Lysa TerKeurst: That's right.

Dr. Dobson: I hope people will remember this: feelings are involuntary. They're not always rational. They show up in the midnight hours and are very difficult to control. That's why continued counseling as a husband and wife is often helpful, even though both the man and the woman are committed to the marriage. You can decide to forgive. In fact, you are required to, as followers of Christ. You're commanded to do that. But you don't necessarily heal from all of the hurt, and you have to give yourself time to do that.

Lysa TerKeurst: Absolutely, and so that's why I have come to understand that forgiveness is a decision to forgive the fact of what happened. We must forgive for the facts of what happened. But then, forgiveness is also a process, where we learn to forgive for the impact that all of that situation or all of that hurt had on us and the cost was great. But what I always want people to understand is, if you make the decision to forgive, you are being obedient to God.

Dr. Dobson: Yes.

Lysa TerKeurst: The process of forgiving for the impact that that had on you, that's where God's mercy and grace comes in and it's okay if that process takes you a lifetime.

Dr. Dobson: That is, again, beautifully stated on page 20 of your book. You talk about the idea of forgiving and forgetting is not Biblical. You can forgive because that's a decision. Sometimes it takes a long time to forget.

Lysa TerKeurst: I think people get confused because God says that he will forgive our sin and remember it no more and cast it to the depth of the deepest sea. But it never says in the Bible that people are supposed to forget. So sometimes I've encountered people, and that's why I even titled my book *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*, because sometimes I've encountered people that say, "I can't forget the pain, therefore I can't forgive." So it was really important to me to untangle that false notion. When I studied this, I spent many, many, many hours with my counselor working through my own hurt and my own pain and taking my own journey of forgiveness. But I also spent over 1,000 hours of theological study, so that I could really understand what the Bible does say and what the Bible does not say about forgiveness.

Dr. Dobson: Lysa, did you really do that?

Lysa TerKeurst: I really did it, and there's actually kind of-

Dr. Dobson: 1,000 hours in Biblical study?

Lysa TerKeurst: Yes, and actually, my theological director at Proverbs 31 Ministries, he says it was over 1,500 hours. But I said, "Nobody's going to believe that. I got to back it down to 1,000 hours." So if you ask him, he would say it was more.

Dr. Dobson: Well, you've been blessed to have some influential people in your life that have helped you get through this. How long were you separated?

Lysa TerKeurst: We were separated two-and-a-half years.

Dr. Dobson: What really was the trigger that brought you back together?

Lysa TerKeurst: Well, after I had that very hard, honest, "Love Must Be Tough" conversation, and again, I wish I had a dollar for every time I've recommended your book, I'd be a very wealthy woman right now, but I decided that I needed to have a break from all of the hardship and all of the hurt. So I requested that we take a break from any communication for about eight weeks. I needed to do that, so that I could really focus on working on my side of the street. Because I knew that I needed to work on some things for myself. I didn't want heartbroken Lysa to have to make decisions from this point on that that were going to affect me and my children for the rest of our lives. I did not want a divorce, but at that point, the only thing that I knew to do is to just give Art what it appeared that his actions were saying that he wanted.

But the state of North Carolina, you have to be separated for an entire year before you can get a divorce. I'm so grateful, actually, that that is the law here in our state. Because I think if I wouldn't have had that year of processing and praying and wrestling and watching to see if Art would ever be willing to come back, if I didn't have that year, I may have rushed into something that could have made the situation even more complicated.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah.

Lysa TerKeurst: But we took the time. Then what eventually caused Art to come back is, God gave him a series of dreams of what his life would be like without me. I'm going to tell you, Dr. Dobson, I had made hundreds of suggestions to God of what God could do to bring Art back. But God never listened to any of my suggestions. But He did have a plan, and He did what only God could do.

Dr. Dobson: Lysa, this time has gone by so rapidly. It always does, but there are some programs that just demand a continuation of the conversation. We're talking to people out there who have been so devastated by circumstances in life and by relationships with those they depended on, especially a spouse, that they're hanging on every word you're saying. So we must continue. If you can spare the time, let's go on talking about this next time. I think what you're saying is absolutely vital.

I do a lot of programs, probably, I think something more than 8,000 broadcasts so far. This one today, given the prevalence of divorce and separation, is just so common that we absolutely must talk some more. Can you stay with us, and we will continue this conversation right now on the phone? We'll let our listeners hear it next time.

Lysa TerKeurst: Absolutely.

Dr. Dobson: Well, thank you for being with us, for writing these books. The first one is, *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. Then the newer one, *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*. We really want to get into the substance of that one. So stay where you are. We'll continue talking.

Roger Marsh: Well, this certainly has been a gripping and honest discussion about the pertinent subject of forgiveness, here on Family Talk. And by the way, for more information on any of our guests this month, be sure to visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. Thanks so much for listening, and be sure to join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of Dr. Dobson's discussion with author Lysa TerKeurst. That's coming up next time on Family Talk's 2020 best-of-broadcast. I'm Roger Marsh. Hope you'll join us then.

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