



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Heart of the Story: Tough Love in Marriage – part 1

Guest(s): Tracey Russell

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Dr. Dobson:

Hello everyone. This is Dr. James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk. And today we want to talk about marriage. When marital relationships are souring and appear to be dying, there's usually one partner who increasingly wants to get out of the relationship, or at least is no longer interested in preserving it. He or she shows this attitude by being distant, angry, rude, disrespectful, insulting, or downright mean or absent. They're frequently at the office or doing something else. And the other partner sees this and panics over the possibility of divorce and begins to beg and plead and cry and appease the other person by saying, "I'll do anything. Just don't leave me. I can't stand it. I couldn't live without you," and grabs and holds.

The desperate partner wants to go to counseling and harangues the other one about going there. While he or she may eventually agree to do it, but it's only for pretenses, don't really have their heart into it. What the husband or wife is feeling, who is on the disengaged side of things, is trapped. Let's say it's he. It can be either one. He feels trapped. He may be looking for a way out. And when he reveals that, that brings more tears and more pleads and what I call grabbing and holding response. I want to tell you that never works in this kind of scenario. In fact, it drives the disengaged partner away. It usually kills what's left of the marriage if it doesn't correct itself.

Now get this. I will call the second spouse a victim, even though everybody knows there are two sides to a conflict. But there's one who wants to hold it together and one who wants to end it. But the way the rejected spouse responds in that period holds the key to the survival or the death of a marriage. If you've never heard that before, you're hearing it now. Not knowing what to do when you see you're losing somebody that you love desperately and you will do anything to make the marriage survive, how you react in that situation will determine largely, not always, but largely, whether or not you make it or don't. And this is what I've written about in Love Must Be Tough. And I don't mean to be self-serving about it, but I want to tell you that it's resulted in hundreds of marriages with whom I have worked, where the relationships survived and rebuilt what had been lost.

Now, I've invited a guest to be with us today who has been through this terrible struggle, and she's agreed to talk about it today. Her name is Tracey Russell. And I'll tell you at the top that her marriage has survived. Her husband is here in the control room with us today. He's listening. He has approved what we're going to talk about today, and he's a great guy. His name is Mark. And we may even talk to him before we're through. Tracey, thank you for being here today and being willing to open yourself and talking about what has been a struggle, especially in the early days, right?

Tracey Russell: Yes. Thank you so much for having me, Dr. Dobson, and I honestly want to tell you from the bottom of my heart, it is such an honor to meet you and to be here and to see your smiling face. So thank you for having me.

Dr. Dobson: I understand that you've read a number of my books, and we've sort of been friends, although I only met you today.

Tracey Russell: That's right. And I feel like I represent hundreds of thousands of women that just want to thank you for helping us raise our families from Odyssey to the books you've written to Strong-Willed Child. There are just hundreds of us that I represent that want to say thank you and that we're all here in your studio and you've been with us all the way.

Dr. Dobson: Well, I'm here to lift your spirits, but you just had lifted mine. So let's get to it. Tell me how you met Mark. I understand that it started at church, right?

Tracey Russell: It did. We actually went to the same church in Miami, Florida. We both grew up in Sunny Miami, Florida, and we went to a Presbyterian church. We met in youth group, and yes, that was where it all started. And we had a short-

Dr. Dobson: I read that you said you saw forever in his eyes.

Tracey Russell: I did. Well, I did marry the cutest windsurfer on the beach, I will say, and I looked in those crystal blue eyes and I saw forever. And so I was just so excited to get married. Our families had gone to the same church and so it was really a joy.

Dr. Dobson: How long had you been together?

Tracey Russell: We had a short brief dating in high school, which I won't get into the details of that one. I say that we had to make each other wait a few years, but after college we got back together. And so we dated about a year and a half and got married.

Dr. Dobson: So you had time to know what you were dealing with?

Tracey Russell: Yes, I did. And so, we were really excited and, just thought this was the boy that I saw on the beach that I never wanted to leave.

Dr. Dobson: Tell me about the wedding.

Tracey Russell: So the wedding was beautiful. It was on Key Biscayne, Florida overlooking-

Dr. Dobson: You brought me pictures of it.

Tracey Russell: I did. It was overlooking a beautiful ocean. And so really, it was our hometown and it was a beautiful 250 guests. And it was just the most beautiful moment of my life, was marrying him.

Dr. Dobson: And after the marriage, you were riding in a car. Tell us what happened.

Tracey Russell: Well, unexpectedly to me, as we said goodbye and the rice was flying in the air, we got in the car to leave and I'm shaking the rice out of my veil and looking over at Mark, and suddenly I saw look on his face I had never seen before. And in your book you say that trouble with the marriage can start on the first day of a marriage, on a honeymoon, or it can start 50 years therein. And I had the unfortunate pleasure of that starting on the first, first moments of our marriage.

Dr. Dobson: What a shock.

Tracey Russell: It was a complete shock.

Dr. Dobson: You'd just had this marvelous, beautiful wedding to the man that you're deeply in love with and have devoted your life to, and immediately thereafter you're beginning to see that there was something different going on.

Tracey Russell: Yes, I saw something cloud over his face. I can't describe it even to this day, but it just looked like a darkness. And on the night we drove to our honeymoon night, the night that was supposed to draw us the closest, there was a very cold distance between us. And so the next morning we woke up and we were so excited we were going to go on our honeymoon cruise. And again, I just felt this growing distance and I thought, "I'm just going to put that behind me," because there was so much to look forward to. And I had people calling me Mrs. Russell for the first time in my life, and I just couldn't wait to be a wife. And so we boarded the cruise and I'm unpacking all the beautiful things that I had. And I finally worked up the nerve to look over and say, "Mark, what's wrong?" And at that point he looked at me and said, "I don't think we should have been married."

Dr. Dobson: What a shock.

Tracey Russell: It was a shock of a lifetime.

Dr. Dobson: What in the world did you do? Did you cry?

Tracey Russell: I cried and I felt like someone had punched me in the gut, and I think I just started saying, "Why did you marry me? Why did you do this? I could have changed all this as of yesterday." And I think I just started screaming and I ran out of the room, and I ran out on the edge of the ship but the ship had left the dock and I couldn't get off that boat. And I knew I was headed into not only the ocean, but just an ocean of pain and uncertainty. And it was a really challenging moment.

Dr. Dobson: You now have lived with Mark for many years. What do you think he was thinking at that moment? What caused this? How do you go from a wedding to complete disenchantment?

Tracey Russell: I think there's a time some people go through a complete crisis of belief and an identity crisis where God is going to bring them to the end of themselves, and unfortunately I know the Lord did that in my life. He brought me to the end of myself after a series of decisions that I had made. And I think this was the time that God was going to absolutely bring Mark to the end of himself and bring him into a wholehearted relationship with himself. But I think at this point he had been enough of a nice guy where some of the issues that needed to get dealt with were all coming to the surface. And I think the marriage caused them to kind of bring it all up.

Dr. Dobson: So the honeymoon was a disaster.

Tracey Russell: The honeymoon was a disaster.

Dr. Dobson: It often is.

Tracey Russell: Yes, and as I went back in the room that night, I remember just hiding in the bathroom because I didn't even want to stay in the room. And I looked in the mirror, and just the day before I had looked in the mirror and saw the beautiful white veil and I had seen this beautiful smiling face, and then when I looked in that mirror, I saw the black mascara running down my face and I felt like I had aged. I felt like an old woman I was staring at that I didn't even recognize. And I knew, "Oh my goodness, I have nowhere to go. I've got to make this work." And so the first stop on the cruise, I ran and found a payphone. I know I'm dating myself with that comment, but I found a payphone and I called home to my mom and I said, "Mom, I think I'm in trouble." And she said, "No, it's okay. These are wedding jitters. It's going to be okay. Go have fun."

But I couldn't make it fun. And I tried and I put on a happy face like most Christian women try to do. We want that happy marriage. But I knew-

Dr. Dobson: More than anything in life.

Tracey Russell: More than anything in the world, and I wanted the pictures and I wanted the moments of love and connection. But I knew the storm was brewing and I knew it was coming and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

Dr. Dobson: You know, little boys in their early days think about power, about athletics, about all kinds of things. Little girls at that time, three, four or five are thinking about marriage.

Tracey Russell: Absolutely.

Dr. Dobson: It's amazing. It's built into the human personality. I don't care if anybody likes that or not, but it's true. A little girl will plan her marriage and think about that for years until it happens. And then when it occurs, to have it blow up coming from the wedding, I can't imagine anything more traumatic than that.

Tracey Russell: It was. It was the moment I had always waited for, and I'll never forget when this was all happening. I ran out on the cruise ship and I just started crying out to God. I was like, "Why? I trusted you with my whole heart. I don't understand." And I heard a voice in my head that's was just so sinister, but I heard, "Look at what your God has done to you now. Look at this."

Dr. Dobson: You blamed Him?

Tracey Russell: No, it was like an evil voice of like, "Look what's happened to you. You trusted God and now look what's happened to you." And I just started crying out to God. I was like, "God, just please help me. Please be with me." And that was really in that moment when I didn't understand what was happening. I have since learned that the Lord entrusts us as Christian women that love Him with really difficult, what I call POWs, plans out of whack or people out of whack. And that was one of them. And he still has-

Dr. Dobson: I don't know how to tell you this, but that's life.

Tracey Russell: Yes it was, but I didn't realize it at the time and I thought I had done something wrong or I was being punished. And what I didn't know is God was entrusting me in that moment to trust Him with my whole life.

Dr. Dobson: Somehow you got through the honeymoon. Then what?

Tracey Russell: So I did what your book says about you go back and forth between-

Dr. Dobson: You hadn't read it yet.

Tracey Russell: I hadn't read it, but I remember this part from the book of appeasement and then a panic and appeasement and I was panicked. So I was going to be the perfect wife. I was going to do all the romantic dinners. I was going to make this marriage work, and I thought, "I have to bring him back into this." But

unfortunately I started feeling a little sick about three months into marriage and so I said, "Mark, I think we need to go to the doctor. There's something wrong with me." And the doctor came back in with a big smile on his face and said, "Well, you're not sick."

Dr. Dobson: "Welcome to motherhood."

Tracey Russell: "You are going to be a mom." And again, Dr. Dobson, in that moment that I had waited for my whole life, now I'm told, I look over at Mark and I saw that same blank stare and my heart just started to drop again. And I went from panic to just total feeling of shame in my heart. And I sat in the car with him and he said, "I told you I wasn't ready to get married and I'm really not ready to be a dad." And I felt it again. I thought, "This is the second tidal wave that's hitting my life."

Dr. Dobson: Did Mark come to you during that period of time and say, "Tracey, I can't even interpret my own feelings, but I'm committed myself to you. We're going to work our way through this." Did you get any encouragement from him at all?

Tracey Russell: No. It was escape. He was gone all the time. So I would come home on a Friday night.

Dr. Dobson: There it is. I just said it.

Tracey Russell: I would come home on a Friday night, he would be gone. I wouldn't know what to do. I would walk around the mall by myself. I would wake up on Saturday morning expecting to plan something fun, he would be gone. And that was what was so hard, is that desire to escape. I couldn't reach him. I couldn't reel him in even to have the conversations I needed to have.

Dr. Dobson: Did you beg and plead?

Tracey Russell: I begged and pleaded, and I begged and pleaded for him to go meet with a counselor.

Dr. Dobson: There it is.

Tracey Russell: I begged and pleaded for him to go to church with me. "Please come to church." I did everything. I was that panicked woman. I ran to anyone and anything I thought could help me at that time. And I actually even ran, at one point after I had realized that he was not into being a father, I called a former boyfriend who was an attorney and I said, "I'm in trouble. I don't think I can make this marriage work." And he said, "No problem. We'll get you an annulment. It's only been three months. We'll prove the marriage wasn't consummated." And I thought-

Dr. Dobson: Your mother was giving you different advice.

Tracey Russell: Yeah. But at that point I realized, "Oh my goodness. Even that out is gone," because I knew I was pregnant. And I said, "I'm so sorry. I cannot go through with that. I'm pregnant." And you know, for a split second, I heard that same sinister voice in my mind say, "Hey, you can make this all go away." But I wasn't going to let my unborn child be rejected the way I was feeling rejected and I wasn't going to lose him. And so I'm so grateful that even though I was going through so much hurt and pain that I made that choice to keep that beautiful life inside me.

Dr. Dobson: There are very few women that I've met who could withstand the pressures and the sorrow and the disappointment and the grief that you were experiencing. Are you a strong woman? Do you see yourself as strong? How did you survive that, Tracey?

Tracey Russell: I believe it was by the grace of God, but I will tell you one thing. I do not see myself as a tough, strong woman, but I come from some incredibly godly women. I had a godly mom who was my Sunday school teacher at the age of three years old and told me Jesus loves me and held up that picture. And I had a godly grandma, who in every moment, and probably in this moment when I was calling her, telling her I was in trouble, she would remind me, "We serve a good God, Tracey. We serve a good God." And so I like to believe that I come from a long line of strong women in Jesus.

Dr. Dobson: Did I read that your mother-in-law was praying for you?

Tracey Russell: My mother-in-law was praying for me too. And so we both had wonderful strong families on both side, which made this even more painful because it didn't make sense. It was nobody's fault. It was just that God was entrusting us with a really difficult situation.

Dr. Dobson: Let's go back now to my introduction and what I tried to say in *Love Must Be Tough*. What I described there was Mark, and I wasn't talking about Mark, but the person that wants out typically feels trapped. "I made a mistake. I'm stuck. How can I deal with this?" And there's always a possibility of divorce, but that's odious too. And they don't know what to do. And they're angry and upset. Was he going through all this?

Tracey Russell: He was. And at the time, it just seemed like, I felt like the man I loved had died on my wedding day, and I was left with this complete stranger who was avoiding me, who wouldn't talk to me. It was almost like he was a completely different person and he was consumed, and he appeared different. He looked different. My husband is a very good-looking man, but at this time he looked like a different person to me. He was clouded over, the blue eyes weren't sparkling, and that's all he did was try to stay away, avoid, avoid, avoid. And it was so painful.

Dr. Dobson: When he would come home from work at night, what happened? Would he-

Tracey Russell: He would go to sleep, and so I was left alone.

Dr. Dobson: He would sleep. That's an escape too.

Tracey Russell: Yes. And so actually after we found out we were pregnant, I went to a pastor of our church, and Mark, I think he went with me, and he had recommended an in-home separation for the first time. And so Mark was sleeping-

Dr. Dobson: That meant sleeping in different bedrooms.

Tracey Russell: Yes. Sleeping in different bedrooms. So Mark was sleeping in one room. I was pregnant for the first time, sleeping in the other room, holding my stomach thinking, "I cannot believe this is happening to me." And I would call my mom and she would talk to me all the way till I would fall asleep at night. And I kept doing that, just reaching out to my parents. But the next time I called them, my dad interrupted the conversation and said, "Tracey, you're going to have to learn to stand on your own two feet." And I said, "What's going on?" And my mom said, "Tom, don't say it." And I said, "What's going on?" And my mom said, "Tracey, I've got cancer."

Dr. Dobson: Oh, my goodness.

Tracey Russell: And so now I've got, I'm pregnant, I'm separated in the same room, in the same house from my husband. And my mom, who was my strongest godly support, had cancer. And I think he left for that Saturday to go do whatever. I fell on the ground and I said, "God, I cannot take it anymore." And my brother who's a physician, he drove over, he picked me up, scooped me up, put me in the car, and I drove home. That was my first separation from Mark, was five months into marriage, two months pregnant, and I went home to live with my parents for a while.

Dr. Dobson: Well, that makes me admire you even more. Were you tempted to just take off, pack up and leave?

Tracey Russell: No, not at that time because I had a baby and I thought, I kept thinking, "Well, this baby is going to turn him around." And few months into it I found out I was having a son and then I thought, "Oh my goodness, a son is going to turn him around. We're going to have this next chance."

Dr. Dobson: You thought maybe the baby might solve the problem.

Tracey Russell: Maybe the baby will turn this around.

Dr. Dobson: It usually does not.

Tracey Russell: Not that I had the baby for that reason, but I thought, "Maybe this will turn him around." Then I found out I was having a son. I thought, "Oh, maybe a son will

turn him around." But it was just a really difficult situation, and nothing was really turning him around. And so I thought, "Maybe the day that he sees his son," but the day that my son was born turned into the third mark on my life of just a complete nightmare. So that was not going to turn him around either.

Dr. Dobson: How did you come across *Love Must Be Tough*?

Tracey Russell: Well, after Chase was born, I was basically living in the house with a man that didn't want to be married and I was walking down the street one day with Chase, and out of the blue I met a man, a friend of mine from college.

Dr. Dobson: Chase is your boy.

Tracey Russell: My son, yes. I was walking down the street with my son in a stroller and I met a guy that I knew in college and the first thing I launched into was, "David Connor, I'm in trouble. I'm in a marriage where my husband doesn't want to be married, I'm in trouble." And he said, "Oh my goodness, you have to read this book called *Love Must Be Tough*. I just heard James Dobson on the radio. Go get this book called *Love Must Be Tough*." And I said, "I will." And I said, "But if you ever can, reach out to Mark and talk to him for me if you ever see him." I said, "But I'm going to get that book right now." So I drove to the Christian bookstore, I bought the book and I did not put the book down for 24 hours. I even worked out with that book. And I'm going to date myself again. I got on a StairMaster and read that book. I would not put it down. I read every word you said.

And unlike the counselors that had told me to be more and do more and all the crazy things they had told me to do, I finally, through your book, met this godly man named James Dobson who sat me down and said that there was a name to the problem, and it was called disrespect and that I deserved respect and that I could make choices. And I love the first part of the book because it said, "This is written to the victims." And I knew that was me, that you were writing that book just for me. But I also learned that I didn't have to be a victim, that I could make choices and I could make decisions that could have the power to possibly turn this marriage around. I just needed to be tough. And so I wrote the letter you told me to write that night and did not stop.

Dr. Dobson: The exact letter?

Tracey Russell: I wrote it exactly. I can tell you exactly what I said. And the next night when Mark came home, I just simply looked him straight in the face and said, "I will always love you. I will always honor our marriage vows and I so desire to love you, but if you do not want to be married, then you will need to go."

Dr. Dobson: Tracey, you have given such a beautiful explanation of a typical path that people walk when going through a struggle like this. There are no ways to describe it. The wounds are so deep and the hurt is so compelling that people are casting about for anything that will help. Thankfully somebody gave you this book. I'm

not given to bragging on my own books. I mean, I don't do that. This is a book that should be read by everybody who has a marital problem, and in fact it relates to all human relationships, parents and teenagers, bosses and employees. It has application even internationally. You know what Neville Chamberlain did at the beginning of World War II was fly off to meet with Hitler and gave him everything he wanted. It was appeasement. It led directly to war.

Now, failure to understand this principle leads to war. Now we're out of time, Tracey, but there's so much more to your story and I know people are hanging on every word. What I'd like to do is to have you on another program and we're going to start by you're reading the letter that I suggested you write. And you took it virtually word for word. I'm going to ask you to read it because it's in the book, but you used it. And, Tracey, thank you for being here.

Tracey Russell: Thank you so much.

Dr. Dobson: And Mark, in the other room, thank you for allowing us to tell this story. We'll close out today and we'll pick it up right here next time.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a powerful story of a marriage that endured extreme adversity. You've been listening to Dr. Dobson's enlightening interview with author and speaker, Tracey Russell here on Family Talk. Visit today's broadcast page for more information on how she's using her testimony to help others. Drjamesdobson.org is where you'll go, and then click on the "Broadcast" icon.

Well, we've run out of time for this program, but be sure to join us for the rest of this week and you'll hear the conclusion of Tracey Russell's story. She'll continue explaining the way she used the book, *Love Must Be Tough*, to save and reconcile her marriage. It's truly an uplifting account that you won't want to miss, and it's coming your way on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening.

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

Roger Marsh: Does your marriage feel disconnected? Are you wanting more one on one time with your spouse? This is Roger Marsh for Family Talk, and we have a great resource for you. It's Dr. Dobson's popular work titled *Night Light for Couples*. This devotional is full of insightful content for couples to discuss every night before you go to sleep. Now, throughout the book, Dr. Dobson addresses tough marital subjects like finances, communication, intimacy, and more. Rekindle the emotional closeness in your relationship with this helpful resource. Request your copy of *Night Light for Couples* by going to drjamesdobson.org, or call (877) 732-6825.