Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: How to Change for the Better
Guest(s): Becky Tirabassi
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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute, supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. You know, there comes a moment when the life that you've been living becomes the life that you can actually no longer escape. The secrets, the shame, the choices you wish you could take back. And sometimes the darkest moment arrives just before everything changes. By the age of 21, Becky Tirabassi had spiraled into alcoholism, drug abuse, and such overwhelming despair that she was actually ready to give up on life altogether. But on one unforgettable day, a frightening encounter in a courtroom set her on a path she never could have imagined. What happened next defied expectations. It challenged everything she believed, and it left even those closest to her wondering what exactly had happened. On today's edition of Family Talk, Dr. James Dobson sits down with Becky Tirabassi to uncover the extraordinary story behind that turning point. Here now is that discussion on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Becky Tirabassi celebrated author, a speaker and the founder of an organization called Change Your Life Incorporated, which is a company that is formed to encourage, teach, and motivate people to achieve their goals and improve their relationships and find balance in their lives. Becky has authored numerous books and other materials related to prayer and health. She's written one now called *Change Your Life: Achieve a Healthy Body, Heal Relationships, and Connect with God*. She's been doing this work for a long time. Becky, welcome. I'm really delighted to have you here.

Becky Tirabassi: Thanks for having me.

Dr. James Dobson: You and I crossed paths back and forth at the National Day of Prayer and other places. You sit here at this moment looking like a very together, well-controlled, motivated person. It hasn't always been that way, has it? You were kind of a mess when you were younger. Is that an accurate statement?

Becky Tirabassi: I was an alcoholic teenager who got into drugs and then immorality. By the time I was 21, I became suicidal because I had done such embarrassing and humiliating things that I hit rock bottom. Now, I can preface that by saying I was

born in the fifties. I was born into a family that every Sunday you got in a car and you drove to the corner church and you would sit, kneel, stand, sit, kneel, stand, and then scream and yell and holler all the way home.

And I had a religious background, traditions, but when I left home at 17, and I left home in an alcoholic rebellious mode of, "I'm out of here. I don't want to be a part of this family. I'm going to college, I'm finding myself." Well, rock bottom at 21, I could only look up. And God used a court hearing with a lawyer who took me by the elbow and said, "If you lie on the stand, you will be crucified." Now, as I mentioned, I had gone to church every single Sunday as a child.

Dr. James Dobson: How'd you get off track? Having that kind of background in the church and everything?

Becky Tirabassi: Well, I'll tell you what I really believe it is. It was alcohol. My father was an alcoholic and his father was an alcoholic. And as a cheerleader, synchronized swimmer, straight A student, I wanted to be popular. And kids who were popular drank in the seventies, in the sixties.

Dr. James Dobson: They still do, unfortunately.

Becky Tirabassi: Well, exactly, and I drank more than the average. The first time I drank, I drank more than anyone else. And that is the common thread of an alcoholic, that you can consume more liquor. Now, I did this at 15, 16. By 16, I was blacking out, passing out, skipping classes, shoplifting. I literally went 180 degrees from a spunky, fun, cheerleading captain, synchronized swimmer, traveling all over the United States to complete alcoholic, smoked two packs of cigarettes a day, foul, filthy mouth, all by 16, graduated a year early at 17, out of the house.

Dr. James Dobson: You had an eating disorder, too, didn't you? Or at least you overate.

Becky Tirabassi: Well, I did. I had everything, Dr. Dobson. From the time you drink too much, I put on probably 30 pounds and some of my friends gave me some bootleg drugs. We would buy speed, we would take dope. I was filled, I was filled with drugs or alcohol. My life, really, at 21, there really wasn't another day left when I went to this court hearing and this lawyer said to me, "You're done. You can't lie." I thought he was telling me I was going to jail, at which point-

Dr. James Dobson: What had you done?

Becky Tirabassi: I'd hit a car while drinking, and a person was in the car. And I had actually gotten knocked out and taken to the hospital and they didn't find me in time to take the alcohol test, so they couldn't really-

Dr. James Dobson: Throw the book at you?

Becky Tirabassi: ...right. But here I am, just a frightened 21-year-old knowing that I am an addict and I am immoral and I couldn't even stand myself. And I have this personality where you just have to have fun. And I couldn't see 20 years in an organization for alcoholics or a hospital to get better. I'm not that kind of person. So it was do or die, sink or swim. And when he said, "You are going to be crucified," literally, the only person I'd ever heard of who was crucified was Jesus Christ.

Dr. James Dobson: He really used that word?

Becky Tirabassi: He did. And I'm sure God placed it in him because it was a moment in time. It was a day I will never forget. It was August 26, 1976. I told the truth at the court hearing, what I could remember, which wasn't much, and I left the court hearing, which was about 20 miles from where I was living in Monterey, California, and I drove to a church, the kind of church my parents had raised me in.

I did not know the name of the church. I did not know the name of the pastor. I went in the doors of this... And it was an outside type church so that I had to walk down outside steps to find someone. It was a weekday. No one was really there. And I found the janitor. And the janitor's name was Ralph. And I started to cry, and I said, "I need help." And he said, "Let's just say a prayer." Now I'm a disco dancing, living with my boyfriend, drug-taking, alcoholic, speed freak, foulmouthed young woman who says, "Okay." I had nowhere else to... I had nothing. I had not a day left. I was suicidal, completely suicidal. All I could think of is, "You've got to have a drink, you've got to have a drink," knowing that if I had one, I wouldn't know what I would do with my body, which had gotten me into this trouble.

And I said, "Okay." He said, "Just ask Jesus to come into your heart." Now, I have to tell you, at that time in the seventies, Jesus freaks were people you really didn't like if you were of my lifestyle. And I pretty much felt like, "Okay, this is what this guy is." But I knew that I had no nowhere to go. So I said, "Dear Jesus, come into my heart." So on this day, when I said this prayer, it was very supernatural because he said, "Ask Him to forgive you of any sins. If you can think of them, name them." Well, I have a very vivid memory, and as I began to explain everything I had done probably in the last two months, this guy's eyes were like saucers.

And he was probably thinking, "Oh, she's way worse than I thought." And I was thinking, "How can this feel good for someone to hear the worst part about you?" To know not that he accepted me, but that he was giving me this impression that God loved me just the way I was, that He would forgive me if I would confess my sins. And little did I know, 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And that was the experience I was having. A shower.

I was a muddy, muddy mess. And the shower was long and hard and fast. And immediately, he said, "Now ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit." Well, I'd

only heard of the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Spirit sounded way friendlier, so I'm like, "Fill me with your Holy Spirit." And immediately, and I can't tell you why it doesn't happen for everyone this way. I think I was so desperate, so ready, so open, so broken, so surrendered in that moment, it wasn't liturgical, it wasn't a service, it wasn't a crusade, it wasn't a Sunday school class. It was an encounter with God. A broken woman, young woman, who didn't deserve a second chance received from God's choice of a person to minister to me who was a janitor because he needed a second chance.

Dr. James Dobson: You have tears in your eyes right now. You're still emotional about that experience that took place.

Becky Tirabassi: Because it's a passion that won't go away. There are so many people lost, and they've been churchgoers. Or they're lost because they are addicted. But life is so difficult for so many people. And the simple connection that I had with God that day radically, absolutely revolutionized my life. I quit drinking, smoking, doing drugs and living with my boyfriend within 24 hours.

Dr. James Dobson: You came out of that church-

Becky Tirabassi: Walked out of that church-

Dr. James Dobson: ...a changed person.

Becky Tirabassi: …a brand new person. And the janitor had said to me, "The Bible says when someone becomes a Christian, you become a brand new person inside. Old things," and, of course, this is Living Bible. "Old things pass away and all things become new." And I have to tell you, Dr. Dobson, I had to believe him. He spoke with authority, the authority of the Word of God. That is all that transpired in that moment so that when I walked out of there... and he told me, "And now that you know Jesus, you've been given a free gift of eternal life."

This was one of the endless thoughts as a child. What if my mom dies? What if my dad dies? What if I die? No one had an answer in my denomination if you die. Well, maybe if you're good enough. Well, I was not good enough. So when he told me I had this free gift of eternal life, all my problems were solved. I have a new life for earth and I'm going to Heaven. What more could a girl ask for? So off I go to work where everybody knows me as one person, and I start saying, "Hey, come to my house. I'm going to have a Bible study with a janitor." And they're like, "You've totally lost it." And some of my friends thought I did.

Dr. James Dobson: Becky, do you know how many people are listening to us right now who are just as lost at this moment as you were then? People who-

Becky Tirabassi: Or their kids are.

Dr. James Dobson: ...and they have no answers. They've tried everything, and they can't find a solution. And it is so easy. It is right there. He is right there waiting.

Becky Tirabassi: Well, that's why I wrote the book, *Change Your Life*, and why I went to a New York publisher and sought an ability to reach a seeker by being in bookstores where seekers go-

Dr. James Dobson: Now this is published by Berkley.

Becky Tirabassi: Putnam. The paperback's Berkley.

Dr. James Dobson: That is a secular publisher.

Becky Tirabassi: It is.

Dr. James Dobson: You were looking to reach out to those who don't know Christ.

Becky Tirabassi: Absolutely. And the simple outline is change begins with awareness. And if you hit bottom, you're aware. Some of us don't need to hit bottom. You're aware there's an area in your life that needs to change. You are empowered. You are given power to change when you admit to God, yourself and others that you need help. There are enough alcoholics in my family that could not say the words, "I'm an alcoholic." And their lives did not change very much.

When I admitted I was an alcoholic and needed help and I asked God to come in and change me, it was so dramatic the change that my friends either thought I'd had a nervous breakdown or they wanted what I had because they had seen me smoke two packs of cigarettes a day, swear profusely. And as you look at me when you started out, you said, "Oh, here's a nice put together gal." It's hard sometimes for people to believe that I could be that lost and that broken and that addicted.

Dr. James Dobson: In fact, you have skeptics who say it couldn't have happened.

Becky Tirabassi: Oh, I have a boss, my boss at the time. She's now retired, but she vividly remembers when I walked into her office and said, "I've asked Jesus to come into my life, and He's taken away the desire to drink, and I'm a brand-new person." And she looked at me and she said, "I don't fully understand what you're saying, but I see a different person."

And later, I was able to encourage her to come to know the Lord, as I did my parents and my brother. And then I got involved in youth work. I left California because it seemed obvious that my life there wasn't going to enhance my relationship with God. And I really was certain that I could never turn back. I had found true love. And immediately I felt a call in my life. This little janitor guy had a lot of friends who prayed and laid hands on you and did all kinds of things.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you ever go back and thank him?

Becky Tirabassi: Well, I only knew him for three months, and I don't even know his last name, and he'll have to find me because I only know his name is Ralph.

Dr. James Dobson: What city was it?

Becky Tirabassi: Monterey, California. And I know he moved. He told me he was on his way to Israel to go to share Jesus, so I think he was quite the evangelist himself.

Dr. James Dobson: You're going to see him on the other side one of these days.

Becky Tirabassi: Certainly.

Dr. James Dobson: I'll bet you're going to give him a hug, aren't you?

Becky Tirabassi: But he and a few other people early on identified my call as an evangelist, which is truly just a person who wants to connect people to the living, loving God in a relevant way. And I've been passionate about doing that for 25 years. And I feel like I have finally hit a place where, I don't know, I'm in the zone or-

Dr. James Dobson: There's no turning back, obviously.

Becky Tirabassi: ...no turning back, but I've achieved something I've been trying to do to really reach the seeker. And with this book and with the media opportunities that it's brought to be on television, I really felt God's power and blessing. I'm moving behind something. I don't know where I'm going, but it's what I have thought He has been telling me all along I would do.

I happened to be at one of the National Day of Prayer events. Dr. Bill Bright gave us all a charge, a call to fast for 40 days before the end of the year for revival in America. When you know you're called by God to make a difference in this world, and if a leader in your life says, "I believe God is calling us to fast and pray for revival," you have to dig in, discover, and then make a commitment of your own, upon which I felt like God confirmed only deeper not only should I be a fasting praying woman, mother, evangelist, but that I should really focus on the seeker, that I should name the name of my company Change Your Life, trademark it, service mark it, go for television on network.

Look for the seeker. Just dig in and go at it. It's been very difficult. And I would say to you, you're right, this is beyond a miracle. It's taken everything I've had to daily and which is another reason I know Shirley and the National Day of Prayer is because I've prayed one hour a day for the last 17 years. And in my prayers, I feel God confirming as well as changing me. The person who was out of control at 17 still has an ability to be out of control at 46. And without that daily time with God where He just not wears me down, but He can change my character.

I came to a point last summer where I still did not see a door open. And yet I believed God was calling me. And I partook of another fast, and I believe it was kind of a final character cleansing. And shortly after that, I met Dr. Bruce Wilkinson who said to me, and it was a random meeting, it wasn't a planned meeting. And his first question is, "What is the dream God's put in your heart?" And I thought, "Now that was a strange first question for someone who's never met you." So I thought, "Well, then I might as well go for broke." And I said, "To be on network television and share the living, loving God in a relevant way." He said, "But if God wants to do something great in your life, He'll certainly begin with a character cleansing. Has he done that?"

And I thought, "Oh, here we go." And a few more weeks passed and more prayer and more fasting and unusual circumstances opened the door for me to be on the CBS Early Show. And the last day of the four-day series was almost the last day of the end of the year, which I had fasted probably over 80 days for revival in America in between the time Dr. Bill Bright challenged all of us and here it was, the 29 of December, and I had an opportunity to share with 2.5 million people how God came into my life in a simple prayer. And I thought, "If you never have another opportunity, go for it."

Dr. James Dobson: They invited you there to tell that story?

Becky Tirabassi: Well, they-

Dr. James Dobson: Did they know what they were getting?

Becky Tirabassi: ...I don't know. I don't think so. But when it was all said and done, they said that was their favorite day and they invited me back and asked if I would start with that story next time rather than end the series. But a genuine, authentic, changed life speaks for itself.

Dr. James Dobson: You deal with health matters. Exercise, eating properly, many other aspects of getting your life under control. And journaling is a centerpiece of what you do.

Becky Tirabassi: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: We don't have much time left. Really bring that down.

Becky Tirabassi: My background as a youth worker was Youth for Christ, Balanced Living. And it really hasn't changed. Each of us are made up of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual components. American women tend to focus on just the physical. Children tend to focus on just relationships. Spiritual often gets left out, and most of us never fulfill the dreams in our hearts.

So in a journal, I've put four days, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, where you would record how to eat right and exercise regularly, where you would forgive and ask God to forgive you on a daily basis in writing, where you would

give, really record how you could tithe to ministries to send in your donation monthly. I write down everyone I send to monthly so I would not forget. Where I talk to God and listen to God in writing, so I teach handwritten journal letters to God as well as a 365-day Bible so that you could read through the Bible in a year and daily hear His voice. So you don't need to get magical, mystical about it.

Dr. James Dobson: You do this every day?

Becky Tirabassi: I do. And I teach it every day and I have for years across the country.

Dr. James Dobson: Where do you get the discipline to do that?

Becky Tirabassi: There is this compelling encounter with God that in the moment when you say, "Dear Lord, I need you" or "I love you" or "Help me today," He is there. And sometimes it's just His presence, but always, if you open the Bible, His Word will be His voice to you.

Dr. James Dobson: Is it still as fresh and new today all these years later?

Becky Tirabassi: I am compelled to connect people with a living, loving God. And it's proof, I guess, that I'm loved and that He's alive. When I can't muster these tears. And you know, as a speaker, you tell the same story over and over. There, I prayed today that the power of the Holy Spirit that is unction would be upon me and us.

Dr. James Dobson: He's here.

Becky Tirabassi: Because this is what people are looking for. Not a religion, but a relationship.

Dr. James Dobson: They're so lost, Becky. They're so lost. It is just amazing-

Becky Tirabassi: But Christians too.

Dr. James Dobson: I meet them on the street and they write and they call, and they're so lost and they don't know who they are, what the meaning of life is or why they're they've been put here or how to deal with things about themselves that they hate. You hated yourself.

Becky Tirabassi: Well, and I've been there. And I think that's why I'm a relevant messenger and I'm a doorkeeper. I stand at the door. Because I know if I can get you in the door, there's plenty of people to disciple you and encourage you along the way. But I'm a good doorkeeper. I'm a good doorkeeper.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Becky, you're a special lady. Thank you for what you do for the Kingdom. Thank you for what you do for all those people out there who are looking for answers, and you're having an opportunity to talk to them. I thank God for that.

Becky Tirabassi: And thanks for having me.

Dr. James Dobson: Becky, come back and see us. It is a pleasure, really, to have you here and I know our listeners have loved hearing from you today.

Becky Tirabassi: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: You know, Becky Tirabassi's story reminds us that no life is beyond the reach of God's grace. Behind the addiction and despair was a young woman searching for answers until an encounter with Jesus Christ changed everything. You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk as we've been revisiting Dr. Dobson's classic conversation with Becky Tirabassi. Now, to hear it again or to pass it along to a friend, visit jdfi.org. You know, Becky's testimony reminds parents how important it is to prepare our children for the pressures and temptations that they'll face in young adulthood. Those early lessons become an anchor when young people encounter difficult decisions far from home and their own family. And that's why the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute offers “Bringing Up Girls,” a free 10-day email series designed to encourage parents raising daughters. Drawing on Dr. Dobson's trusted guidance, you remember the title, *Bringing Up Girls*, the national best-seller, this series explores how to nurture truthfulness, self-discipline, kindness, modesty, and sound judgment. It's about helping your daughter develop the character and confidence to make wise choices, even when the culture around her points another way. To sign up for the free “Bringing Up Girls” 10-day email series, simply go to drjamesdobson.org and search for that title, “Bringing Up Girls.” Again, you'll find it at drjamesdobson.org or jdfi.org. Those web addresses are one and the same.

Raising kids today can feel like you're swimming against the current. and no parent should have to make that journey alone. That's why the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is here to come alongside moms and dads with biblical wisdom, standing firm on the truth that children are a gift and family is worth fighting for. Your tax-deductible donation helps to keep that help coming for families all around the world who desperately need it. And you can make your secure donation online when you go to jdfi.org. That's drjamesdobson.org or those initials, jdfi.org. They're one and the same website. If you prefer, you can speak with a member of our constituent care team. That number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Or if it's easier, you can write to us. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. 80949. Once again, our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, or just use those initials, JDFI for short. P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for joining us today. Be sure to tune in again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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

Hi, everyone. Roger Marsh here. At the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we believe strong families build strong communities. That's why we're committed to providing you with resources that strengthen your home. Thank you for partnering with us to support and encourage families all across America.