Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Remaining Faithful Against The Odds – Part 2
Guest(s): Clebe and Deanna McClary
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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today. Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. You know, some of life's greatest tests come after a crisis has passed, when the reality of what lies ahead really begins to sink in. Imagine being a young bride, walking into a hospital room, and barely recognizing the man you married. For Deanna McClary, that moment would become a defining test of love and commitment. But the McClary story doesn't end with physical recovery. An unexpected encounter would change their spiritual lives forever. On the last edition of Family Talk, we heard how Marine veteran Clebe McClary nearly lost his life in Vietnam. Today, Dr. James Dobson continues his conversation with the McClary's about the extraordinary challenges that followed. Here now is Dr. James Dobson with his guests, Clebe and Deanna McClary, on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, when we ran out of time yesterday, we had just heard that tragic story of how you were wounded, Clebe, in Vietnam, and you'd lost an arm and an eye, and your leg was shot up. Very fortunate even to have survived. The Lord obviously had a purpose. He wasn't through with you. That's all there was to it. In fact, a North Vietnamese soldier came up to execute you and shot you through the neck in a way that you didn't bleed to death, which is still just hard to believe that you survived it. All right. Now, pick up the story right there. They got you to a hospital. You began one of how many surgeries through the years?

Clebe McClary: 37 in two and a half years. I had about six months in Bethesda, Maryland, and then from there about a year and a half in Naval Hospital in South Philly. But they came to see me in Bethesda.

Deanna McClary: That was the first time because Clebe's mother and I were getting ready to go to meet him in Hawaii when we got the telegram the day before we were to leave saying that, I'll never forget that telegram, said your husband, Lieutenant Clebe McClary, has suffered a traumatic amputation of the left arm shrapnel wounds to all extremities, prognosis poor, outlook very dim. That's what we were faced

with. A few hours later, a telephone call came in saying that his left eye had been enucleated, completely blown out. Two days later, another telegram said they were going to amputate his left leg. Gangrene had set in and quite honestly I just really thought the next telegram would tell me Clebe had died. And I had to wait a little over a month. And finally they called and said they were flying Clebe from Japan to 49th Camp Drake Hospital to Bethesda Naval Hospital. And we got, his parents and I flew up there that night. They wouldn't let us see Clebe that night because he was too weak and very frail.

Dr. James Dobson: How old were you at that time?

Deanna McClary: I was 19.

Dr. James Dobson: What is it like to be a young bride at 19 who had only spent, how much time? A year?

Deanna McClary: About six months. We're six months.

Dr. James Dobson: To get news like that, a telegram, a cold telegram saying what you heard?

Deanna McClary: It was overwhelming. But I was really in shock when I got the telegram because a Major Bolson and a doctor met me at my house. And I was getting my hair fixed and getting ready to go. And that's when I got a call from my aunt that said, “Deanna, you need to come home. There's some men out here that need to talk to you.” And I'd always heard from other wives that when men come to your house, that means your husband's dead, that they're coming to deliver a death message. So that's what I was expecting.

And I got in the car and drove home as fast as I could, crying the whole way. My mother was with me. And I got there and I saw that Marine Corps car there. And I ran in, and I was just crying because I just knew my husband was gone and everything in my life was gone. And that's when Major Bolson grabbed me, and he said, “Ms. McClary, he's alive. He's alive.” And at that point, Dr. Dobson, I didn't care what they could have told me, anything. Nothing else mattered because I thought if he's alive, then there's hope and I can be with him. And if I can be with him, he's going to be all right. I just knew that if I could be with him, he was going to be all right.

Dr. James Dobson: What was the status of your faith? And Clebe, what was yours at that time?

Deanna McClary: We had Bible study and prayer every night. Clebe can tell you. We both grew up in church and going to church and feeling like we were good people. We felt all right, I guess, with ourselves.

Clebe McClary: We were religious. I impressed her. She impressed me. God wasn't impressed. We had nothing in our heart.

Deanna McClary: It was a theatrical faith. It really was. It was trying to impress each other, and I guess society and our friends and family. It was very non-personal.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, did this tragedy drive you to your knees?

Deanna McClary: Yes, it did drive us to our knees. But at this point, we were so involved in what was ahead that, you know, I would be praying to God every night to spare his life. And this experience, walking into the hospital room, is probably the biggest turning point because when the elevator doors opened, the doctors were all there waiting for us. They'd given us a designated time. And I was shocked when they were standing there when the doors opened. They said, “Ms. McClary, we have to prepare you for the initial shock. We have to tell you what your husband looks like before you ever walk into his room. Your reaction this day is vitally important to his recovery.” Those were indelibly accurate.

Dr. James Dobson: Clebe, did you want her to see you in this condition?

Clebe McClary: I didn't. In Japan, I didn't want to come home for a while because they wouldn't even let me look in a mirror or take any pictures of what I looked like. But I really wanted to see her. And I think deep down, I wasn't too worried about what Deanna's reaction would be. I hated it before to see me like that, but I knew her.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, when you saw him, Deanna?

Deanna McClary: Well, at that hospital that day, when they tried to prepare me, that's when I heard Clebe's voice. I heard his voice.

Dr. James Dobson: What did he say to you?

Deanna McClary: Well, he didn't say anything to me. He was talking to somebody in the room, and it was garbled and muffled, and I didn't know why. And I said, that's my husband. I said, you know, I don't really care what he looks like. I've been in nursing, and I was. I was in nursing studying about prosthetics and amputees, and I felt that God had prepared me. I was ready for this mission in my life. And they said he was at the end of the hall, and I said, well, let me be the first one in his room. And I really knew his mom and dad were not prepared. I felt like I wanted the doctors to really talk to them. And I guess selfishly, I wanted to be the first one in his room. And I walked down the hall and there were three doors and now I'm not sure where he is. And I heard him talking.

I walked inside that room with the door open and there were two men in there. That shocked me. I knew the man to my left was not Clebe because he had two arms. I looked at the man in front of me and I didn't see Clebe. And I thought, well, I'm in the wrong room. Now that's where as a 19 year old, I was embarrassed and I want to kind of get out of there. And I thought, well, I hope they don't think I'm staring at them because I was, you know, feeling what they

might be feeling. I thought, I've just got to quietly leave. As I turned to leave, that's when I heard Clebe say, “Honey, it's me. Dee, it's me.”

Dr. James Dobson: You didn't recognize him.

Deanna McClary: I didn't even recognize him. And there's no way you would have either. He said, “Honey, I know I'm not too pretty to look at. But I thank God that I'm alive to be with you right now.” And Dr. Dobson, well, you can imagine. You can see the scars on his face right there. And that day, everything was so swollen. His nose was just totally ripped apart. His lips were ripped apart. Both eardrums were patched where both eardrums had been blown out. Big patch over his left eye. This whole side was all swollen. You can see the black metal. And then it was far. It was protruding. It was an unbelievable experience. And because of my nursing, I thought, well, I can't even touch him because it's a sterile field. I didn't want to contaminate him bring bacteria into his body that would kill him. So I was in my mind what I do? And then all of a sudden I saw a smile on his face because I was walking closer to the bed and I thought not to touch him is going to hurt far worse and I just seemed to pick him up because he'd lost so much weight. I just put my arms around him and looked into his eye and he was smiling and as he smiled that day that's when I realized all of his teeth had been blown out and literally the scars where they'd sewn his mouth back together were pulling the inside of his mouth to the outside which may seem grotesque to some people, but to me, I thought if Clebe McClary can still smile after all he's lost and after all he's been through, he's the same unscarred man on the inside. And truthfully, that's the day that I realized that scars don't have to change a person.

Dr. James Dobson: Not a thought went through your mind that I can't do this.

Deanna McClary: Not a thought. I knew I could do it. I knew I was prepared for that moment in my life. And going back to my childhood, you know, and I thank God I look at my daddy today and how precious he is, but during his years of alcoholism. You know, a lot of people look at their past and they say, why was I born into that family? Why did I have to go through this? I thank God I was born into that situation. I thank God for the trials I went through. I thank God for my mother who put up with my daddy during his years of alcoholism. She taught me what commitment to love was all about. She taught me to stay when times were unlovely, when they weren't always what you wanted them to be. And that was all a part of my strength in being able to face that moment. It was a preparation time.

Dr. James Dobson: There's the bottom line for these two programs. There's the message. There are a lot of people bailing out over tiny little frustrations by comparison.

Deanna McClary: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: You hang tough.

Deanna McClary: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: You hang in there. Clebe, was it like an angel coming in to see you on that day?

Clebe McClary: It really was. It really was. I know that God had a purpose and a plan for my life, but she gave me a want to and a will to live. And that just brought it more. And we weren't over with it. The hurt's still there, the pain, the surgery. You can't imagine the stitches and all in your face and how it feels. Just having her there and to go through it with me. She didn't just help me. She just went from room to room all through the hospital. They called her sunshine and just brightened everybody. Let me tell you. She can tell you about wife after wife that didn't come in.

Deanna McClary: I saw that. That killed me.

Dr. James Dobson: Where they just bailed out.

Deanna McClary: Oh, listen, there was one in Philadelphia, an alphabet ramp from A to Z with 300 and 400 double and triple amputees. And when he was in surgery, they gave me free run of the hospital. I would walk down those halls, and I would watch women walk in to wards and take their gold band off or their wedding ring and just drop it into the chest of a man who maybe had just lost his arm and say, I can't handle this. And they'd walk out. And not only were they in shock, I was in shock. And I went through a lot of anger. And I think that's why I didn't want to write a book. I've never wanted to write a book. But I am thankful that I was asked to write that book, *Commitment to Love*. And I don't know if you realize this, but I was in our office one day, and I got a phone call from Thomas Nelson, they said, we just saw Clebe's docudrama. We want your life story. And then 30 minutes later, y'all called and said, we'd like to do your book. And then 30 minutes later, Billy Graham's book came, *Ordered Death and Dying*. I thought I was not long for this world. I thought, why do they want my life story?

But, you know, I thank God for that because that allowed me to go through these experiences. And it was just a healing for me because I saw things, Dr. Dobson, that no one has probably ever seen. And these young people that are talking about the war and everything like that, if they could go in and see these veterans and see the price that many of those were willing to pay, it's unbelievable.

Dr. James Dobson: A lot of those vets were spit on when they came home.

Clebe McClary: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: And rejected.

Deanna McClary: Oh, Clebe, tell them about the airport when you picked up!

Clebe McClary: That was amazing. I had a major airport in the country, and I usually try to carry my own bags and everything. I was walking across and had two or three bags, and I was trying to pick them up, and a guy came over and picked up a bag and started carrying it to the car for me looked at me and said, what happened to you? I said, a car wreck? I said, no, Vietnam. He threw my bag down and said, serves your rights. I said, you know, I'm glad my heart's right.

Deanna McClary: Clebe said, I'm glad I believe you.

Dr. James Dobson: That was a crazy time.

Clebe McClary: You just don't know.

Dr. James Dobson: That was an awful time in American history.

Deanna McClary: But Clebe has spent so much of his life going back into high schools now because of Ralph Johnson and Tom Jennings, and I thank the Lord for that because Clebe has probably spent so many years of his life now teaching preparing young people and trying to re-educate them.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. Now, let's talk about when the deeper move toward the Lord came, when you gave your heart to Him. Clebe, how did that happen?

Clebe McClary: We were still there in the hospital in Philadelphia, Bethesda, really, and got to leave to go home. Our first time to go leave, and Dee drove us home and got there and went. While we were there, we just got home and had a long drive and read in the paper that one of my heroes, Bobby Richeson, who played with the New York Yankees, was going to be out at the football field, and Von Decay Von Dyke. Any Marine like to see Von Decay, and Bobby had been a friend and a hero through the years. I said, let's go out there that night. It was a teen rally at the high school, and Billy Zioli of Gospel Films from Michigan was speaking. Tell you the truth, he really turned me off, his dialect and his dress and the way he acted.

Deanna McClary: He had long hair, too.

Clebe McClary: But you know, sometimes people, they don't like a Southern accent or they don't like Marines. They may not like you, but that doesn't mean God can't use you. And what God used him in what he said that night, I could say the whole message, but he came down to, “There are two kind of fools in this world,” Billy said. He said, “Are you a fool for Christ or a fool for others?” And he looked out there and said, “Who's fool are you? Who's fool are you?” I knew that night who's fool I've been all my life. Never drank, never smoked, just become a good athlete, just impress people. Deanna and I had Bible study and family devotion and going to church and everything. We'd been fooling other people. We had it all in our head, but it was an empty vacuum in our hearts the only Lord can fill. That night, we both went forward together. I was in a cast and a brace, and I thought she was coming to help me down.

Deanna McClary: And I thought he was going to make sure I was going to make it down that night because I had protested about going to a crusade. I thought it was fanatical, and I was controlled by vanity and pride at that point in my life because as an adult child of an alcoholic, I didn't feel good about myself, and I had to be perfect all the time. And that night I didn't feel perfect, and I didn't feel right, and I didn't want to go. And I was making everybody in my family miserable. And then Mother went back there and looked at me. She said, look in the mirror and then look at your husband and realize he doesn't care who sees him. What kind of wife are you being? And she gave me one of those nice motherly talks. And I went that night. And that's the night that I heard, you know, yes, no, or maybe. I heard a part of the message that I knew that I was in a maybe category because if I died and as close to death as I've been with Clebe, I didn't know where I was going to spend eternity. I had a hope. And I certainly had a desire, and I never doubted God. But I was beginning to realize certainly He was not my Savior and certainly not the Lord of my life.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you hear that little inaudible voice that night calling you, Deanna?

Deanna McClary: It was incredible. When the invitation was given, the last statement was, The biggest fool in the world. It's the person that can sit here tonight and hear God's simple plan of salvation. You're the biggest fool if you walk away and reject it. And I knew then, I didn't want to relate to the fool part of it, but I realized how foolish I'd been. And it was hard, Dr. Dobson, taking the first step because I'd been a cheerleader in my hometown. It was in my hometown. That football field had represented my entire social life, and to go forward meant like saying I was so weak, and I didn't ever want to admit my weakness, you know, but that night I took the first step, and it was unbelievable. I heard shuffling behind me, and I turned around and saw Clebe. And I thought, what is he coming for? I'm going down to become the kind of person he's always been. I thought if there was ever a moral and righteous man, it was my husband. I thought if there was ever a godly man, I was married to him. And I said, “What are you coming for tonight?” And he said, “I'm coming to receive the Lord as my Savior. I was really shocked.” And, you know, that proved to me that night it's not by works. If it was works, Clebe would have worked as well. He'd have been on the top rung of the ladder. But it's by grace and faith in the Lord.

Dr. James Dobson: What happened at that altar that night, Clebe?

Clebe McClary: I'll say, so many people told me I was a Christian that I thought I was. And that night, Sam Anderson opened the word. God went through the scriptures with us and showed us that we had to have a personal relationship and we could have the assurance of our salvation. We both prayed together, Deanna and I, and confessed our sins and invited the Lord Jesus into our hearts. We found where the real joy, the real life, the real peace, there's so many us searching for that comes to that personal relationship with a living Savior.

Dr. James Dobson: Your passion from that night to this has been to bring other people to the Lord, hasn't it?

Clebe McClary: I guarantee you.

Dr. James Dobson: That's the reason, Lord. That's what takes you all over the world.

Deanna McClary: Every moment of every day.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, listen, you guys. We're talking to a lot of people out there who don't know the Lord. We're talking to people who are spinning the radio dial today on the way to work, and they just happen to hear you or are on the way home. Explain for those people what's in your heart and what the Lord offers to them.

Deanna McClary: Well, the Lord offers absolutely…He's everything you'll ever need. We realized that night at that crusade that God had put us together for a very significant purpose, and we're a team. You know, Clebe's unable to do some things. Dr. Dobson, it's obvious with two fingers, you're unable to button your shirt and you're unable to tie your shoestrings. You know, these things come in your life that you have to adjust to. When you have a solid foundation in the Lord, it doesn't matter what the circumstances are. When you've got the foundation, the Lord's going to help you through those circumstances. We have an attitude of gratitude. That's what I love about Clebe. He doesn't cry about what's gone or what he has left. He's thankful for what he has left, one eye. And he's got three pieces of metal in that eye, and he knows he could lose it any day. But he's grateful for it. So having an attitude of gratitude expresses a lot.

Dr. James Dobson: Clebe, talk to that same person.

Clebe McClary: I just heard yesterday less than a half percent serving in our military today of our population. Thankfully, hopefully, not many people are going to go through a battlefield and be wounded and so forth, but we're going to have different battles in our life and different problems. The Lord Jesus Christ hung up all our hang-ups if we just turn to Him and ask Him to come into our hearts and help us and turn over our problems to Him. He can handle them.

Dr. James Dobson: Clebe, when you go to high school auditoriums to speak to students, you can't always give your faith as you have today. What is your message to them?

Clebe McClary: I share my experience with Vietnam and what's happened to me, and then I share a good bit of character and morals and attitude. But I use Scripture verses, and they can pretty well tell where it comes from without having to come out and say. You can talk about the master, coach or whatever. But I think they get the message. And schools have been real open, they really have. But you've got to be tactful. You don't want to close the door to you or somebody else. I may not be God's man in that school.

Deanna McClary: But he'll go in with the message of success. And what is your definition of success? He opens up with that and he's been...

Clebe McClary: Finding God's success is finding God's plan for your life early in life and staying in it all of your life.

Dr. James Dobson: Clebe, as you sit here today with one eye, one arm, and other physical problems, your hearing is affected, would you do it all over again?

Clebe McClary: Yes, sir, I sure would. I think this country and our free enterprise, it's worth living for, it's worth dying for, and I don't apologize for it.

Dr. James Dobson: You have no regrets.

Deanna McClary: He really doesn't, because I've asked him.

Clebe McClary: No sir. I'd like to won it in six months, like I think we could have and should have, but we didn't have the commitment. You've got to have a commitment to make things work.

Dr. James Dobson: Deanna, is that for real?

Deanna McClary: That is for real, because I've asked him that before. I said, Clebe, do you wish you had listened to me when I begged you to stay home? No, that's true. We did. And you know what? He said, no, and guess what? I wouldn't change it either. That's the amazing thing. I would not change one day of our life to be where we are today. It's worth everything we've been through. It really is, Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: God's will is always like that.

Deanna McClary: Absolutely.

Clebe McClary: And God didn't cause it, but He allows it. Sometimes we got to get our feet knocked out from under us before we look up. Maybe my guide was athletics or coaching or sports or the Marines or whatever, and God allowed it. And he used it, and hopefully for His glory.

Deanna McClary: And through that, through this whole story, is that night I saw how God loves us so unconditionally. And then I began to realize I had conditions on my love for my father. And I began to love my daddy so much so that I began to pray for him. Where I'd ask God to take him away, I thanked God then that he'd never answered those foolish prayers. And as I prayed for my daddy, I found out what God's transforming power is all about. Because I saw my daddy begin to change, and I saw his heart change, and I saw him come to the Lord, and then my mother and other members of our family. And you talk about a victory. It's to see our family today and the beauty from all the ashes. God has just brought such a beautiful picture.

Dr. James Dobson: What a wonderful story that is, and it's so good to have you here. I've appreciated your sharing your story, letting the Lord make use of this chapter.

Deanna McClary: Can I share one more thing that when Clebe was speaking, the beautiful part about our relationship, and I think when you spend 31 years together in the Lord, you become as one. And wherever we go, somebody will see Clebe, and you'd think they'd recognize one arm and one eye in a patch, but they don't recognize Clebe, and then they'll see me, and they'll think she looks for me, but then when they see us together, they know our first names. And Clebe was speaking somewhere, and this lady, Pam Mitten, I don't know who she is. I hope to meet her one day. But she shared this poem. Could I read this quickly? Because it means everything as far as commitment to love. And as wives, we are to be completers and not competers. And this says it all to me and why women are important in a husband's life.

It says, I once met a soldier, a hero of war. One arm and eye were missing, but still a smile he wore. He told me how his tragedy had come about, and then he told me of his teenage wife who taught him how to win. She taught him how to overcome his tragedies in life. She walked with him through every trial, his gentle, loving wife. She helped to make her husband into what he is today. She gave him back his will to live, to smile day after day. Now, though I might not meet her while living in this life, because I've seen this soldier, I've also seen his wife.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, what a wonderful. That was written for you all, specifically for you, Deanna.

Deanna McClary: Yes. And I've never met her. She met Clebe, but in Clebe saw me.

Dr. James Dobson: I asked Clebe earlier in this discussion if he knew he had that kind of strength inside of him. Did you know you had this kind of strength in you?

Deanna McClary: Oh, I thought I knew he had that strength.

Dr. James Dobson: No, I'm talking about you. You showed as much strength as he did.

Deanna McClary: Well, I just knew my love for him. I knew that that and that love was that strength. And yes, I guess I did. Dr. Dobson, when I walked into that room that day, I knew the strength was there because I told the corpsman, I want to do everything there is to do, because you can imagine as a man who is a very independent man. I put myself in his place. I thought, how would it feel to have to literally have all of your bodily functions cared for by the one you loved? And I figured the one you loved could be the best one to do that. So I did everything from the very first day. The corpsman taught me how to take his eye in and out. And I did everything. And we had to learn to laugh. And there's a lot we're not covering. I mean, things, Dr. Dobson, that most people never think about, they'll have to go through in life. But we did it. And that's what we're willing to do, whatever it took to get him to where he is today.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I trust the Lord will continue to. your ministry, and thanks so much for being with us today.

Deanna McClary: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Clebe and Deanna McClary's story reminds us that commitment is revealed not in what we promise, but in how we actually love through hardship. Their courage, perseverance, and trust in Christ offer encouragement for every family facing an uncertain road ahead. Your listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and the conclusion of Dr. Dobson's conversation with Clebe and Deanna McClary. You can hear this broadcast again at drjamesdobson.org. In fact, you can share the link with a friend who may be inspired equally by listening to this broadcast.

Think back to the first time you encountered Family Talk on the radio or on the internet. Maybe the program met you in a difficult season, or maybe it gave you the words when you had none, or simply maybe it gave you words to identify what you were going through when you really didn't have any, or it simply reminded you that God has not forgotten you or your family. The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute exists to bring that same hope to millions more, holding fast to biblical truth, the sanctity of human life, and religious freedom in a culture that keeps shifting beneath our feet. When you give a gift of any amount, you help keep this trusted voice on the air for the next weary listener who turns on the radio or clicks online and needs to hear it. You can make a tax-deductible donation through the U.S. Postal Service. Our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. If it's easier, pick up the phone and call a member of our constituent care team. That number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. 6825. Or you can also give a gift through our secure website at drjamesdobson.org.

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.