



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: God's Tender Heart for Single Moms – Part 1

Guest(s): Angela Thomas-Pharr

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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: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Parenting brings both incredible joy and exhausting challenges, but for single mothers raising children alone, those demands can feel overwhelming. Today's classic conversation here on Family Talk features Dr. Dobson discussing this issue with author Angela Thomas-Pharr, who found herself suddenly divorced with four young children to raise. Angela is a graduate of the University of North Carolina and Dallas Theological Seminary. She's written two powerful books we'll be discussing: *My Single Mom Life* and *Tender Mercy for a Mother's Soul*. Her story is one of God's redemptive love, transforming deep pain into ministry and hope. So whether you're a single parent or you know someone who is, Angela's testimony will encourage you. She is living proof that even in our darkest valleys, God never abandons us. Here now is Dr. James Dobson with his guest, Angela Thomas-Pharr, on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the single mom book is entitled *My Single Mom Life*, Angela Thomas. You have four children.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: I do. Two girls and two boys.

Dr. James Dobson: You don't look old enough to have four children, and most of them are either teenagers or about to be.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: They are, nine to 17. And I'm old enough to have had at least four more.

Dr. James Dobson: As you have written in this book, having four kids either approaching the teen years or there already is an exhausting responsibility.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: It is.

Dr. James Dobson: You write about that, don't you?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: It is. I do. I write about the journey.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the other book is called *Tender Mercy for a Mother's Soul*, and it's not written just to single mothers, but to women generally.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: About how to meet their own needs while meeting the needs of their family.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: You're right. How to care for your soul in the season of motherhood. That's what *Tender Mercy* is about.

Dr. James Dobson: You have a great commitment to Christ, don't you?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: I do. I'm staking my whole life on the truth of Jesus Christ and His work and how it matters to surrender your life to God, your family, your children, the way you parent.

Dr. James Dobson: And you speak around the country. With four kids, how do you do that?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Well, I'm the provider for us. And so I think God gave me one of the all-time coolest single mom jobs ever, that I'm at home all week with the children. I leave Friday morning after I get them off to school and speak somewhere in some state and then get home usually Saturday night late. And so the kids know mom's away, but it's a cool job to be back home and to be there full-time mostly.

Dr. James Dobson: Angela, you were married and thought you would always be married. And as you approached the time to come here, your marriage began to fall apart.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: And against your wishes and will and commitment for your life, you couldn't hold it together. I don't know how much you're willing to tell us about that or how much you think you should. I know that you don't want to be disparaging to your ex-husband.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: No.

Dr. James Dobson: Tell us as much as you want to about what happened.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Well, like many of your listeners, I was raised in a Christian home with parents. My parents this year have been married 46 years. They've modeled for me godliness, beautiful marriage, and so I have been trained well. And I'm a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and I've been educated well and personally made some very, very strong commitments to marriage and children and family. But there were very difficult years. In that time, in those years, I went to my church and submitted myself to their authority: the elders, my pastor, the counselors. And so walking through the process of separation and

divorce happened step-by-step under their leadership. Nothing happened until they gave direction prayerfully. And so-

Dr. James Dobson: And yet you were not the one who filed for divorce.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: No.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we will leave that right there, but let's pick up with what that meant for you. You had always expected to be married and stay married. You were obviously committed to your family, and yet it fell apart. What was that like? What was the day that the divorce was final like for you?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: I think the finality of the divorce is a bit surreal. The day that was the most devastating was the day that I packed up laundry baskets of clothes for my children and put the kids in their car seats, picked up two at school and drove to my parents' house. That was the day that was-

Dr. James Dobson: It's still tender today too, isn't it?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Sure.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: As a woman who belongs to the Lord, and it's the one thing you think you can avoid, that you would not have to be a part of.

Dr. James Dobson: Angela, I'm sure you know, as you describe this with tears in your eyes, that there are millions of other women out there who identify exactly with what you're saying.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Well, there is such a shame associated with divorce and an ongoing embarrassment for educated, bright, committed, tender women who love God and want to glorify Him with all their lives. And so there are women everywhere I go who I know when they bend their head and they move in close to me and whisper, I know what they're going to say. They will say, "Me too."

Dr. James Dobson: Was there an inordinate amount of apprehension or fear that you now had essentially the full responsibility for raising those four kids and for whatever financially that was going to mean in the future and all of a sudden, you had it alone.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: What was that like?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: God has been good to me. I have an amazing family who has been supportive. The children and I live there for four months.

Dr. James Dobson: You mean with your parents?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: With my parents. And I did not know how I was going to provide for us, but I did know that I was healthy and that I would do anything God gave me to do. And so when we moved into a little rental house with nothing, it's the house that I came to call the blessing. People would come over and I would say to them, "You want to see the blessing?" Because it was a house that had furniture and dishes and a lawnmower and a man rented this house to us when we had nothing.

Dr. James Dobson: Literally nothing.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Literally. And no means. And yet I knew I would do anything that God gave to us.

Dr. James Dobson: You're really kind of a survivor, aren't you?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: God has been a provider.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you think of yourself that way then?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: No. No. I assumed it was over because it seems like, I don't know, maybe it's my background or no one ever taught me this, but it seems like as a woman who loves God when you are divorced, that the Lord is going to have to put a D on your back. And I had given my whole life to ministry and it seemed like God was going to say to me, "Angela, you still get to make Heaven, but I really can't use a woman like you."

Dr. James Dobson: Was that what was going on in your head at that time?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Self-doubt.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Well, maybe I should go to...

Dr. James Dobson: Self condemnation.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Exactly. Maybe I should go to law school.

Dr. James Dobson: A little guilt.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Exactly. Oh, huge.

Dr. James Dobson: A lot of guilt.

Angela Thomas Pharr: Shame. I have been a part of an amazing church and yet have encountered in different settings or with different people, an unspoken judgment that is life taking. It sends you home doubting yourself. It sends you home wondering if that's what God thinks of you too.

Dr. James Dobson: How much of that came from your fellow Christians and how much of it was generated within yourself?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: I think a good part of it comes from yourself. It came from me. The other big part of it comes from the body, from the Christians that you encounter who maybe have never... You almost can't understand something you haven't walked through or you believe could be done differently or handled differently. Now, the broken Christians, they have a mercy to give. And when I began to meet some people who had also been broken and they began to give me just what I believe Jesus wanted, they began to give no condemnation, just like the Lord would give. And when I would encounter people who gave no judgment, they gave healing and mercy and grace and compassion, then I came to understand, oh my goodness, it seems exactly like what the Father would give as well. And so my ministry has been about giving what has been given to me.

Dr. James Dobson: I know from your writings that you feel that that brokenness is now a tool that the Lord can use because people can identify with what they see in you because they're broken too.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Exactly. Life falls apart for a million reasons. It doesn't have to be divorce, health or sickness, different financial issues, but pain is pain is pain is pain. And when people know that you have encountered a deep and devastating pain, there's a connection in that. But I think that when you have been broken, it is perhaps the best thing I take into my future. I love better and my ministry is more effective because of the brokenness. I had been such a striver with regard to my faith, that if you could do it, that's what I was going to do. Whatever I could do for the Lord and in my brokenness, finally coming to understand all this time I have needed a Savior and that when the Lord stoops down to save you from your circumstances, there is a knowing about your faith that I had never encountered before, a salvation from these circumstances.

It is one thing entirely to know the theology of redemption. It is exactly different to live the truth of God's redemption, that He would take devastating circumstances and redeem them for His glory.

Dr. James Dobson: Angela, when you go off to speak on Saturday night and that you have connected with the crowd, is there a little group, a little cadre around you that are just, they see you as a life preserver? And if so, what do these women say to you? What do you hear?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: God has given me such favor. Women are hurting and the healing that I can testify to, it's attractive because it comes from the Lord. And so they circle

around me and normally they say, "Please don't go. Stay. We want to know more. We want to walk with you." And the testimony is that no matter what the circumstances, how dark they may be or what, when life turns out exactly how you never believed it good, when the walls cave in and the floor gives way, and when it looks like all hope is lost, when a man or a woman decides, "I will lay my life on the altar of God." Where God is, whether it be that you lay your children, your single mom children on the altar, your single dad children, your home, your future, however dark and bleak it is, wherever God is, then life can still become amazing.

And people need to know that. That's what God does. When you begin to understand why people make the choices they make, why they choose poorly, because the pain is so intense and the emptiness is huge and the loneliness, oh my goodness, it's overwhelming. And so I do understand why people begin to choose out of that loneliness. They choose to watch things or interact with people or see things that no one should see. My girlfriend called the other night and it was a Saturday night and my kids were away and I was at home and it was lonely and she said, "What are you doing over there?" And I said, "Well, I am over here with all my integrity and it's lonely." And she said, "Well, take that integrity and go to bed." Because when you are broken and empty and devastated, then the heart ... And you begin to understand why people have done what they've done, but there is a choice.

Dr. James Dobson: This is the really sad aspect of that situation, which we've all seen, which is where the self-doubt, low self-esteem, sense of condemnation, the guilt, and that despair makes a woman particularly, and a man too, but a woman especially, a sitting duck for a relationship that will make it much, much worse. And along come somebody who might not be committed to the same values, may not know Jesus Christ, may have all kinds of baggage and that woman may run past red flags all over the place and get herself into a mess that is just going to lead to perhaps another divorce. She's thinking, "I need to find a husband. I need to find a father for those kids." You know that child abuse often comes out of that because sometimes the motives of a man like that are pedophilia. I mean, not always, and I don't want to plant that seed, but that does happen.

And it's one of the reasons why the abuse of children sexually is so common in second and third and fourth marriages. So boy, you've just got to be guided by the Lord by every step at that point when you feel like your heart's going to break.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Exactly. And I think one of the most powerful things that we can do is be aware of our design and our weaknesses. Some days we have strong days and then more often than not, there is a weak moment or a weak day where I am trying to teach women to discern the difference between the voice of the Father and the voice of the accuser because the accuser is the one who says to a woman in her weakness, "Well, you better take that man because it looks like that's all that's coming."

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, that's the last choice.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Choice. Or you should go that way or you should interact with those people or maybe that momentary joy is all you're going to have. So just go for that. And you'd think, goodness gracious, I mean, I have that seminary degree and everything, but you can get turned around in your head and not realize that the voices that you hear and the words that you keep repeating to yourself are actually the words of the accuser. In 1 John 4, we learn that the accuser who is not perfect love wants to keep reminding you of your sin or keep making you think that you deserve punishment. And there are so many women who are laden with that kind of guilt. When the truth of it is, the father says that you are forgiven and forgiveness really forgives for now and for all eternity. We're supposed to live in the celebration and in the glory of what has been given to us.

The accuser attacks when you're empty, he gives this over and over accounting of your sin or where you missed the mark or what you could have done differently. He speaks into your ear, "Hey, you still deserve to be punished for that." And so a woman...

Dr. James Dobson: And God doesn't even love you. As a matter of fact, He's forgotten you.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Exactly. And He's sending you to the back of the line.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: And so she hangs her head and sits on the back pew at church and thinks that's all that she is entitled to.

Dr. James Dobson: And often sits on the back pew of the church alone.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: Because everybody seems to be married. You tell a story in the book about going to a Christmas service and looking around and everybody had a husband or wife.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: Well, it's the perception because I went that Christmas Eve with my children. We slid in. I was so happy to be there with my children. It was a candlelight service. And of course people are there with their extended families and I began to look around and it didn't seem like there was any other single mom in the whole entire church. I know there are single moms at my church, but I looked around and it seemed like there was a man and a woman and some kids and the grandparents and in-laws. And the truth of it is they could have been third or fourth marriages. They could have been as dysfunctional as can be, but the perception was that night, I'm the only one.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, you're the only one. Angela, go back to the day that you decided you were going to make it. There was a specific day for you, wasn't it?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: There was a day. We had moved into the Blessing House, the house we were renting, and there was furniture in the house, but not enough beds. And I did not have anything. I didn't have money. The only thing that I had was the diamond from my engagement ring. And somehow I qualified it in my mind that if I sold the diamond and used it for the children, that would be the right thing to do. And so I do remember vividly the day that I went to a jeweler there where I live and asked to see him and I had the diamond in my pocket and I thought maybe this is the most embarrassing thing I've ever done. And as I was waiting for him, there was a man looking at engagement rings and I thought, "Oh my goodness. He's getting ready to begin and I'm ending."

Dr. James Dobson: You're closing the door.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: And the man who came from the back was obviously very busy and interacting with his employees all through the store, but he looked at me and I know that when he looked at me, he knew why I was there. And so when he came over, I said, "I was wondering if you buy diamonds." And he said, "Well, let me see." And I will always be grateful for a sweet little jeweler who treated me like I was trying to give him a deal on the Taj Mahal. He looked at my diamond and said, "Just a minute, let me look at this." And he told me he'd be happy to buy my diamond for \$1,400. And so he went in the back and came out with a check and had these big crocodile tears in my eyes and all he said to me that day was, "I'm very sorry."

Dr. James Dobson: My goodness.

Angela Thomas-Pharr: And I took the check next door to the bank and I cashed the check and I took the cash three doors down to the furniture store and I bought bunk beds for the kids and I thought, "Well, we have beds. We're going to make it."

Dr. James Dobson: We're going to make it. Did you sense the leading of the Lord in getting through that day?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: If there was any strength about me, it had to have come from the Lord. Those months were the weakest months I'd ever known in my life.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Angela, we have two books here that you have written and I hope to transition from one to the other, but we're still talking about the first one, which is *My Single Mom Life: Stories and Practical Lessons for Your Journey*. Well, we today have only just started the unfolding of your experience, which you then turn around and use to reach out to others who are where you were then with very practical advice, very specific suggestions, and most of all, empathy. You use a book to put an arm around people, don't you?

Angela Thomas-Pharr: I hope so. I pray that. I pray that the book is like passing my notes back, that some mom can avoid some hole I stepped in because of the lessons I've learned.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the other book, as we indicated at the top of the program, is *Tender Mercy for a Mother's Soul*, and there you're talking to women generally, and we will just continue next time and transition from the first book to the second. I often say this on a program when I have people here who are sharing difficult moments. It's very easy to come here and talk about how everything's wonderful, but you know what? Life is difficult for everybody. There's no one that doesn't stub their toe and sometimes experience things a lot worse than that. And to come here and admit that, you talked about being embarrassed when you sold your ring. I'm sure that every time you talk about this, there is a little bit of grief, a lump in your throat, that this is not what you wanted, this is not what you had in mind, it's not what you thought would happen, but it's the life you have and you're making the most of it and God is using it by your being willing to open yourself and let people see it.

I know, I've been doing this for 30 years. I can feel when things go out of these microphones and out to places all across the country and around the world. And I can feel coming back those passions from people who are saying, "That's me. That's what I've gone through. And she really does understand where I am."

Angela Thomas-Pharr: I think the Lord sends me out sometimes just for that one purpose. "Hey, ladies and gentlemen, we have Angela Thomas, a broken-down Jesus girl. We'd like for you to see what it looks like when God stoops down to pick up a broken woman. Hey, would you stand up, Angela? Thanks. You can sit down." Just to show what it looks like, that God stoops over in His mercy and stands up even the broken for His glory.

Roger Marsh: Angela's willingness to share her story honestly reminds us that none of us have to walk through hard times alone, and you've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk featuring Dr. Dobson's conversation with Angela Thomas-Pharr about navigating single motherhood after divorce. Now, if you missed any portion of today's broadcast or if you'd like to share it with someone who needs a ray of hope, visit jdfi.net. There you'll also find information about Angela's books, *My Single Mom Life*, and *Tender Mercy for a Mother's Soul*. And be sure to join us again next time when Angela continues her conversation with Dr. Dobson on this most important topic of God's tender heart for single moms. Angela's story reminds us why the work of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute matters so deeply. When you support the ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, you help us reach single parents who feel alone and forgotten.

Your partnership allows us to continue broadcasting messages of hope to families all across America who are searching for answers. To make a secure donation, visit jdfi.net or call a member of our constituent care team at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Now, if you prefer, you can send us a letter through the U.S. Postal Service and wow, we're inundated with great

response during the month of November and December. Please continue to send those donations through the mail when you write to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh and from all of us here at the JDFI and Family Talk. Thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for part two of Dr. James Dobson's inspiring conversation with Angela Thomas-Pharr discussing God's tender heart for single moms. That's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you can still trust for the family you love.

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