



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: What Is a Girl Worth? – Part 2

Guest(s): Rachael Denhollander

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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. I'm Roger Marsh. Before we begin today's program, I want to let you know that we will be discussing some very sensitive and mature content on the broadcast today. If you have young children listening right now, we encourage you to use parental discretion. You might want to keep them occupied with something else, or return to this broadcast at a more appropriate time. You can listen at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Thank you so much for your understanding and your discernment, and now here is today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Hello, everyone. I'm Dr. James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk. Yesterday we heard a wrenching account of sexual molestation, abuse inflicted on a young woman who was a gymnast at the time. Her name is Rachael Denhollander who is back with us today. She was repeatedly abused by the team doctor who went on to assault her and an unknown number of young women. Rachael began trying to report this crime, but she met with nothing but pushback and refusal by authorities to take her seriously. For her courage, Rachael has received numerous awards and honors. In 2018, she was listed among Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World. She was recognized as Woman of the Year by Glamour Magazine. Rachael was also awarded the Inspiration of the Year award from Sports Illustrated and she was a joint recipient of ESPN's Arthur Ashe Award for Courage. She regularly speaks all over the country on college campuses, in governmental legislatures and as a member of the California Bar Association, Rachael also spends time with corporations and organizations to help prevent sexual abuse and harassment.

This is one incredible woman. She was here yesterday, as I said. She's back with us today. Rachael, I can't tell you how much I appreciate what you've done to bring attention to this issue and to bring justice to not only your situation, but that of many other women and I'm sure men too. You've paid a tremendous price for what you've chosen to do. Let's go back to that time when you were in an impossible situation. You were getting abused regularly by Dr. Larry Nassar. When did you really decide to go public? Because that was a major turning point in your life.

Rachael Denhollander: It really was the first opportunity that I saw. And that happened in August of 2016. In August of 2016 a newspaper called the Indianapolis Star, released the results of an extensive investigation into how United States Association of Gymnastics had handled complaints of sexual abuse against coaches. Now, Larry wasn't named in this report, but when I read it, it was very clear to me that these reporters understood the dynamics of abuse. They understood how corrupt USAG was, and they saw the importance of shining a light into that darkness. And so as soon as I saw that, I wrote to them immediately and I said, I wasn't abused by a coach, but I was abused by USAG's team physician. And I told them what had happened. And I said I will come forward as publicly as necessary if you can just get the truth out.

Dr. James Dobson: But the truth was apparently slow in getting out. Did the print media or televised news or any other entity get word of what Nassar had done to you?

Rachael Denhollander: I don't think the Indy Star saw any of that because USAG does not appear to have left a paper trail and the head of the United States Olympic Committee admitted that he deleted emails regarding Larry and the warnings that they had of Larry's abuse. And so the Indy Star didn't know anything about those who had spoken up about Larry before. That was obviously a huge part of the reporting process and the investigative process, both for Indy Star and the other outlets that covered this over the last three years, is just discovering how much corruption there was.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, after the story finally broke, did other girls come forward with their own accounts of abuse?

Rachael Denhollander: There were two others that contacted Indy Star shortly after I did. One of them did not participate in the investigation and the first report. The other one did agree to participate anonymously. And so when Indy Star published our stories, I came out very publicly and my name, my face, allowed them to record a video testimony describing everything that had happened and explaining the dynamics. And then they were able to use parts of this other gymnast's story. And we know now that it was Jamie Dantzcher, but she was anonymous at that time. And so they published both of our stories at the same time.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, as this tragedy started to unfold and people began to be aware of what had taken place, what happened at Dr. Nassar and how long did it take for that case to come to trial?

Rachael Denhollander: Well, it really unfolded over quite an extensive period of time with an incredible team that came together. And that's one of the things that I really wanted to do in the book is lift the veil on what it took to get there because most people really tuned in at the sentencing hearing when they saw all of these women, finding their voices and speaking up. And there was almost this sense of Larry's demise being inevitable. But that's not at all the way it was when I first came forward. That's not at all the way it was for the first 18 months. And so, one of

the aspects that I really wanted to dig into in my book is what it took to get to that point and how unusual it is to see the result that we saw.

Larry was under investigation for a substantial period of time, we had an incredible team that came together, a detective who was passionate about finding the truth and did investigations in a way that no other detective had ever done. We had a prosecutor who was willing to fight for us when other prosecutors did not want to bring charges. We had a team that came together, that was passionate about doing the right thing and bringing justice. And I'm deeply grateful for that. But people need to understand that most survivors don't have that. And that's why it is so critically important that we are advocating and being a voice for those who don't have a voice.

Dr. James Dobson: I think you said during our earlier conversation that at least 16 other girls came forward eventually and yet the prosecutors, those with legal responsibilities still didn't want to bring charges. Is that what you're saying?

Rachael Denhollander: Yes. There was a point in time where it looked like there weren't going to be charges brought at all. When the local County prosecutor made the determination, even though by that point, I was an international news story and there was over a dozen reports of Larry's sexual abuse on the police desk and more than 50 women between the civil lawsuit and police lawsuit had spoken out about Larry's abuse. A decision was made to allow Larry to plead guilty to possession of child porn in exchange for dropping all of the existing sexual assault claims, mine included.

Dr. James Dobson: Wow.

Rachael Denhollander: And we were incredibly blessed because we had a police chief who picked up the phone and he called the attorney general and he asked the attorney general to come in and to take the case. And the attorney general agreed and he sent one of his best prosecutors and she picked up our files and she said, "I will fight for every one of them."

Dr. James Dobson: Wow. That is an outrage. It makes me angry to know that there are many other underage kids out there who are being horribly abused even as we speak, and no one seems to care, at least not to them. I thank God that the man who molested you and all those other girls and women didn't get away with it. Where is that prosecutor now? The one who refused to bring charges in your case.

Rachael Denhollander: She is currently the Governor of Michigan.

Dr. Dobson: Are you serious?

Rachael Denhollander: Yes. Her name is Gretchen Whitmer. Now she has been active in other legislative reform and so I'm hoping to continue working with her on these

things. But again, I think that's something people need to understand is prosecuting these cases is difficult and it's very difficult to find someone who's willing to bring those charges or who feels able to bring those charges.

Dr. James Dobson: Even though this isn't a new understanding to me, I have to tell you I'm aghast because I know this takes place all the time, doesn't it?

Rachael Denhollander: It does and it takes place in every political party. It takes place across the spectrum. It really does.

Dr. James Dobson: Reports of the trial indicate that Larry Nassar was convicted of sexual abuse. He was sentenced in 2018 to 60 years in federal prison and 40 to 175 years in state prison and Michigan State University was required to pay \$500 million in a civil lawsuit that they settled with victims. Is that the bottom line? Is that the outcome?

Rachael Denhollander: That is part of the outcome. I would say that it's definitely not the full picture of the outcome for a couple of reasons. First, in terms of accepting responsibility for what took place, Michigan State University has actually still explicitly refused to accept any responsibility. They did settle that lawsuit with the first group of survivors, but they are continuing to fight the second group of survivors in civil court and they have refused to identify even one thing that was done wrong on their campus.

They have refused to commission an independent investigation into what went wrong so that those problems can be fixed. In fact, for the last eight months, myself and another survivor who is also an attorney and another one who's a communications and marketing specialist had been working with Michigan State University to fashion a comprehensive review of what went wrong with Larry and all of the warning signs that got missed, the loopholes, all of the areas where there are problems at MSU. Across the university, across the spectrum, and that would culminate in a public report that would help inform the public and help inform the university's response of what needs to change to make sure that this never happens again.

And half of the board of Michigan State University was successfully able to quash the push for that independent review and refuse transparency and refuse accountability. To the extent that a board member resigned over it and USAG is in an even worse position. They have refused to settle anything with the survivors. They still disclaim any liability and they believe they have a publicity problem. They do not believe they have an abuse problem. They have yet to identify a single abusive coach. They have yet to identify a single thing that they have done wrong. And in fact, both institutions and members of those institutions frequently still attack the survivors.

Dr. James Dobson: Rachael, how are you dealing with this? Are you angry today?

Rachael Denhollander: It is a great deal to have to carry, not just my own abuse of course, but when you're engaged in the world of advocacy, you are constantly surrounded by the evil and the darkness and by the amount of pain that others have been put through, the amount of injustice. And so I have found it is incredibly important now to allow myself to grieve. Also incredibly important to remember that the shadow proves the sun for lack of a better explanation. You can see the darkness because goodness does exist. And where there is goodness, there is hope. I am truly not angry. I am horrified. I am disgusted. I am deeply grieved. I do think there is a level of righteous anger against evil but in terms of a vitriolic anger, no I am not angry.

Dr. James Dobson: I want to ask you one more question about how this has affected you and it has to do with your faith. You were raised in a Christian home and you have a strong commitment to Christ, but did this experience affect your relationship with the Lord when you were going through the worst of it?

Rachael Denhollander: Absolutely. I had all the questions of course, that everyone has. Where was God? Does God exist? Does He care? And I think one of the things that was the most instrumental for me was actually a quote by C.S. Lewis from his book *Mere Christianity*. And Lewis said, "My argument against God was that the universe was so cruel and unjust. But where had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he first has some idea of straight." And sometimes that was all I had to hold onto, but I realized if I lost the concept of God, I lost the ability to define good and evil. And that didn't actually fix the problem. It didn't fix the grief or the weight or the questions that I had. It constrained me to a world of moral relativism where society and culture was the final determiner in some way, shape, or form in some model was the final determiner of what good and evil are.

Rachael Denhollander: And so that was just an extremely powerful reminder to me of where the truth really is.

Dr. James Dobson: Rachael, after you speak to victims of similar abuse come up and tell their stories to you?

Rachael Denhollander: Oftentimes.

Dr. James Dobson: What do you tell them?

Rachael Denhollander: I grieve with them. I consider it an incredible privilege to be trusted with their stories and I grieve with them because what they have been through is grief worthy. Those wounds are legitimate, they are real. The damage is there and you feel that grief and that horror for a reason because it is such an apparition from what safety and trust and security and all those concepts are supposed to be. And so I grieve with them first and foremost because it is grief worthy.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you recommend that they come forward with their stories despite the fact that it's going to be difficult for them and people are going to hound them and ridicule them?

Rachael Denhollander: That is really a very individual decision, honestly, for each survivor because not every survivor is in a place where they can do so safely and so for those who are in that place or that are considering that decision, I let them know I will be there, I will support you 100% you know and help create those support systems, help connect them with people where they can make that report but I do not pressure them to report because everyone is dealing with individual circumstances and reporting may not be within their power at that point in time.

Dr. James Dobson: You've been blessed to have a very caring and supportive husband, haven't you?

Rachael Denhollander: I have been incredibly, yes.

Dr. James Dobson: His name is Jacob and he knows all about your journey obviously. Did he live through the early parts of this disclosure with you or was that afterward?

Rachael Denhollander: I didn't meet Jacob until I was a couple of years into law school and so I was in my very late teens, early twenties when we met, but he has been just an incredible support and rock from the very beginning. He's been my safe place since I first told him. And I am deeply grateful for that.

Dr. James Dobson: Do your children know anything about the struggle?

Rachael Denhollander: They knew a little bit. My kids are still quite young and so most of what they know are more broader concepts. That there was someone who hurt mommy and hurt children and that mommy is doing everything she can to make sure that the truth is told and the children stay safe. And we have a lot of discussions about the cost that comes with that because of course my children paid a price too. There was an incredible amount of just unrest and upheaval in the family. A lot of transition that we had to go through to be able to see this through. There was a lot of sacrifice on everybody's part. And so I have those conversations with my kids that sometimes it costs to do the right thing and that people's bad choices have consequences on everybody.

And we talk about the fact that there was a man named Larry who made bad choices and he hurt a lot of kids and because he made those bad choices, even before you were born, now you're having to pay the price for those bad choices too. And that's why mommy and daddy want to help you learn to choose what is right because your actions affect everybody. Wrong choices hurt you and it hurts everybody around you sometimes long after those choices are made. Because I think that's one of the most powerful things we can do for our kids is to show them the ugliness of evil and the harm that it does. And the beauty of choosing what is right and good.

Dr. James Dobson: Our hearts really do go out to you Rachael. And there are many people listening to us who are going to identify with you by because they been through something similar. Let's take the remaining few moments to talk about your two books.

Rachael Denhollander: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the book that describes what you've been through has a curious title. It's called *What Is A Girl Worth?* Explain that to us. What was it that you were conveying with that title?

Rachael Denhollander: Yeah, that that is the question that I asked every judge that I was in front of when I had to testify or to speak on behalf of survivors in numerous victim impact statements because that's really what it boils down to. How much is a little girl worth? How much is a person worth? Because again, every time we make a decision, we are putting one set of interests on one side of the scale and we're putting the value of humans on the other, the people who are going to pay the price or the decisions we make. And so that was the question I asked every judge, how much is a little girl worth? Is she worth the full protection of the law? Is she worth every measure of justice?

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let me ask you a personal question. Did you feel unworthy when you were being abused? Did you feel worthless during that time?

Rachael Denhollander: There was absolutely a time period of questioning, extreme questioning, whether my value had been diminished because of what I had been through. And that's part of that title too and especially the children's book. That was something I really wanted to be able to discuss in the memoir was, not just lifting the veil on what it took to wrest control from these organizations. The team that was put together, the incredible effort that had to be made because really, it's a very compelling story in and of itself, but also to look at what we need to do better as society to help people understand what survivors go through and how to become good advocates and also to wrestle with the ultimate life questions that all of us face.

How do we make our decisions? How much are people worth? Are there things that diminish our value? Because those are all questions that we face regardless of our background, regardless of our gender, regardless of anything we've been through. Those are all ultimate life questions that we have to walk through.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, talk about your book for children. It is beautifully illustrated. I think it was done by Morgan Huff.

Rachael Denhollander: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: We're almost out of time. Tell us what the content is about.

Rachael Denhollander: It's just, Morgan did a great job with those illustrations.

Dr. James Dobson: I just love it.

Rachael Denhollander: I love the illustrations in that book. But that book was really born, not just from a desire to be able to communicate with my own daughters, but it was really, I would say a love letter to all the little girls that I can't save because the harsh reality of advocacy is that you can do everything you can, but there are a lot of people that you still can't save.

And so what I wanted to do with that book is write a book, not just for survivors, but a book for little girls in general, to talk to them about the message of how much they are worth. And so this is not a book that's written for survivors. It's a book that's written for little girls to help them understand where their value comes from and that their value can't be diminished by something that's done to them. And it also can't be increased by something that they accomplish because our girls are bombarded with messages that their value comes from something extrinsic to them. It comes from their sex appeal or their beauty or their professional accomplishments, their academic accomplishments, their athletic accomplishments. And when a child believes that their value comes from something that they accomplish, or some physical feature...

Dr. James Dobson: Or from God's blessing. They need to understand that God created them and He loves them.

Rachael Denhollander: Right. And that's the message that little girls desperately need to know is that value does not come from something they accomplish. It's intrinsic to who they are. And so to start that conversation with your daughters, regardless of the background of where your value comes from and what success is and how you define that is really the message that your girls are going to need regardless of what they will face in the future. And regardless of where they've been.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you have any last advice in closing here for parents to help them protect their children from a very immoral world?

Rachael Denhollander: I think the most important thing that parents can do is to have an open avenue of communication with their children so that their children know they have a safe place to speak up there so that issues of sexuality and privacy and bodily autonomy are things that are discussed regularly in the home without shame. They should be treated with respect. They should be treated with privacy. And so to have those conversations with your children from a very early age in an age appropriate way so that they know their voices are heard and listened to, and they have a healthy understanding of bodily autonomy and consent and privacy and respect and where their value comes from so that if God forbid something does happen, they know they have a place where they can speak up. They know they will be heard and listened to and believed and that they can be

supported through the healing process. And of course that's also integral to prevention as well.

Dr. James Dobson: Again, we just have a minute left. What is the future of the sport that you love so dearly? Can you still watch gymnastics?

Rachael Denhollander: I love the sport of gymnastics. I think there are incredible things that can be learned from it, but right now the organization is truly still so corrupt and there so much abuse, not just sexual abuse but verbal, physical and emotional abuse that goes on in the world of gymnastics that I find it very difficult because when I see those little girls up there now, these incredible elite athletes, the realization is what many of them have gone through to get to that point. Very few of them are coached in a way that's truly healthy.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Rachael has been a pleasure talking to you, although this has been a difficult conversation, difficult subject. I trust that some of what you've said that they will begin to make a difference in the way the culture views sexual abuse. There's much there that needs to change and change quickly. Right now, the culture largely ignores it. I've got a little granddaughter and a grandson and my heart is very tender to them and what the future holds in a world like this. I thank you for having the courage. I have said that many times, but I thank you for being honest and open about this subject. This is a difficult thing to talk about and we're going to do what we can to let people know about it and how they can help.

Rachael Denhollander: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: I appreciate you and will you come back and see us when you're in Colorado Springs or this area?

Rachael Denhollander: I would love to do that, if that works. I would love it.

Dr. James Dobson: Thanks for being our guest.

Rachael Denhollander: Thanks so much for having me and having a conversation.

Dr. James Dobson: God be with you.

Rachael Denhollander: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Rachel Denhollander's story is one of traumatic pain that was radically redeemed by the love of God and her courage to speak the truth has opened doors for countless survivors who once felt voiceless and alone. You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and Dr. Dobson's moving conversation with Rachel Denhollander. Now, if you missed any part of today's broadcast or if you'd like to go back and listen to part one of the conversation as

well, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And while you're there, you can also find information about Rachael Denhollander's book called *What is a Girl Worth?* Again, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

Here at the James Dobson Family Institute, we're committed to strengthening families through biblical truth and practical wisdom. Programs like today's broadcast help equip parents with the knowledge and courage they need to raise their children in an increasingly challenging world. If today's conversation has impacted you, Would you consider partnering with us financially? Your tax-deductible donation of any amount helps us continue sharing these important messages with families who desperately need hope and guidance. To make a secure donation, go to drjamesdobson.org. To give a gift over the phone, call 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

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

Announcer:

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