



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Finding True Forgiveness – Part 2

**Guest(s):** Dr. James Dobson

**Air Date:** January 14, 2025

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 back for another edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Let me ask you a question. Have you ever caught yourself saying, "I just can't forgive him, not after what he did to me or what she said to me"? We all know how deep, emotional, and physical scars can run and how hard it can be to move forward once those wounds have been well-worn. Those wounds from betrayal or abuse or even abandonment can feel almost impossible to overcome. And yet Jesus challenges us to do something remarkable to let go of keeping score of the wrongs that others have committed against us. Well today here on Family Talk, we're going to continue a powerful conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and his dear friend Dr. R.T. Kendall, talking about finding true forgiveness. Dr. Kendall knows this topic intimately, having counseled countless people struggling to forgive others over his decades of ministry.

And today our guest will be tackling the myths we believe about forgiveness. He'll also show us why holding onto bitterness can actually be destructive to our physical lives as well as our spiritual growth. Dr. R.T. Kendall served as pastor of Westminster Chapel for 25 years. He holds four advanced degrees and has written over 60 books. His *Total Forgiveness* trilogy, which we'll be discussing today, has helped countless of people find freedom through genuine forgiveness, not by minimizing their pain, but by showing them God's path to true healing. On our last program, Dr. Kendall shared his powerful seven steps to total forgiveness, explaining that true forgiveness must happen in our hearts rather than necessarily being expressed to those who hurt us. On today's family talk program, he'll tackle the common misconceptions that many of us have about forgiveness, helping us to understand what forgiveness is and maybe more importantly what it isn't. He'll show us how forgiveness sets both the forgiver as well as the forgiven free. Now let's join Dr. James Dobson and his guest Dr. R.T. Kendall for the conclusion of this classic conversation on forgiveness right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: You talked in your book about what forgiveness is not. There's some concepts in there that do not represent true forgiveness. Why don't we start our discussion

today with you describing those aspects of forgiveness that are sometimes confused with the meaning of the word?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, the first would be approval of what they did. In other words, the fact that you forgive them doesn't mean you approve. Someone may think, oh, he let me off the hook. It doesn't mean that what you did was okay, you certainly don't approve it. Jesus forgave the woman that was caught in the act of adultery, but then he went on to say, "Leave your life of sin." So you don't approve just because you forgive.

Dr. James Dobson: The second one was excusing what they did. Forgiveness is not excusing what they did.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Yes, you don't improvise for them and say, "Well, now here's why they did it," or, "I excuse them it's okay." That's not what we mean by total forgiveness. Total forgiveness is when you know exactly what they did and you still forgive them. Sometimes people think, well, I just put it out of their mind what they did. That's repressing and that's dangerous.

Dr. James Dobson: Number three is justifying what they did. That's pretty much the same thing but explain the difference.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, it means to show a person or a statement or act to be right or just, or reasonable. There's no way that evil can be justified. God will never call something that is evil right and he doesn't require us to do so.

Dr. James Dobson: And number four is pardoning what they did.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, I would define pardon as a legal transaction that releases an offender from the consequences of their action such as a penalty for a sentence, and this is why we do not ask that the guilty rapist be exempt from punishment. Such a person needs to pay their debt to society and society must be protected from people like that.

Dr. James Dobson: Number five surprised me and it dealt with reconciliation and you said their forgiveness is not necessarily the same thing as reconciliation. You can forgive without reconciling explain how.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, let's say a person has been unfaithful and it was your best friend, you forgive them, but it doesn't mean you're going to be best friends after that or take a person who's a child molester and this person has been forgiven, but I don't know that you would offer them a Sunday school class. And so that's the principle. Reconciliation it means that everything's going to be just as it was, not necessarily. The key is whether there's bitterness and there can be total forgiveness, but not necessarily reconciliation.

Dr. James Dobson: Reconciliation also implies an equal forgiveness on both sides and you can-

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Oh, absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: ...only handle one of the two. You're not responsible for what the other person thinks or feels.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: But even there can be mutual total forgiveness, but it doesn't mean that you're going to be each other's best friend or that you want to go on holiday with them.

Dr. James Dobson: Number six is forgiveness is not denying what they did.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: You see, to deny, as I said a while ago, is kind of like being in denial, repressing. I've known of people who said, "I don't believe they really did that to me," but I say, "But they did. They did." The verse that you quoted on the previous broadcast, love keeps no record of wrongs. The Greek clearly shows that you recognize there was wrong. The wrong is not denied, but you decide to tear up the record.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, well, there's several other concepts there and in the interest of time, let me go to number eight, which has to do with forgetting. You can't necessarily forget, many people say forgive and forget as though they're one and the same thing.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: No, you can't play games with your-

Dr. James Dobson: You might not be able to forget.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: That's right. You can't play games with yourself. You do know what they did. You cannot forget. It is said that, well, God forgives and forgets. Look here, He does know what He's forgiven us of and you can never forget what they did, but the brilliance in total forgiveness is when you know what they've done you're not living in denial. You have remembered it, but you do forgive them and it is a sincere, genuine forgiveness.

Dr. James Dobson: The Scripture says, "Our sins will be remembered against us no more." It's not that they won't be remembered in the mind of God. He knows everything, but it will not be remembered against us anymore.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: R.T., let's bring this down to an individual situation and try to address those who are listening to us with very, very specific reasons for the anger and the bitterness that's inside. Let's make it specific. Let's suppose we're talking to a woman who's 30 years of age who was abused physically by her father. Let's suppose that she was beaten. Let's suppose that both parents were abusive, maybe they were alcoholics and they subjected that child to unimaginable punishment and ridicule and she's now 30 and that still burns in her heart. Talk

to her because there are people I'm sure who find themselves exactly in the same situation I just described.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, the first thing I would say to her is that I do understand. I really understand and although I haven't been through what you've been through, my heart aches for you and I don't know how you've endured it. I don't know how you stand it and I am sorry for what you are suffering. I can only say that there is a way whereby this evil can be turned into good and you can do what very few people do, and that is so to get over it that you actually pray for them and pray for that person to be blessed. And the result is that you are set free and you begin to see for the first time that the bitterness however justified it seemed at the time that bitterness was eating on your soul like a cancer and you were impoverished to the degree you didn't forgive.

And I have seen it in my ministry. When people do forgive, the freedom is so wonderful. They say to me, I never dreamed it would be so good. It's wonderful, it's tremendous and what it does for you is the thing. So I understand why a person doesn't want to do it, and I don't point the finger and I don't say shame on you for not forgiving because it's the hardest thing in the world, but I would want to motivate them for them to see how good it's going to be if you do it.

Dr. James Dobson: Will the Lord meet you halfway? Will He take a step towards you each time you take a step toward Him in this regard? Will He lead you in trying to deal with what at this moment seems impossible?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: I will say yes to that. I don't think anybody's ever asked me that question before, but yes, because He's touched with a feeling of our weaknesses. He's not there looking down, moralizing us.

Dr. James Dobson: He remembers-

Dr. R.T. Kendall: So he knows-

Dr. James Dobson: ...that we're dust.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Oh, listen. And at the right hand of the Father where He is our intercessor, He has never forgotten what it was like when He was on this earth. So He's touched with a feeling of our weaknesses and I would say every step we take, God will witness and you can almost hear Him saying, "Good, good. Go on." And one works through it and I don't say you'll come to it by tomorrow afternoon.

Dr. James Dobson: Or that it will be easy.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: It is not easy. It is the hardest thing one ever has to do. I don't think there's a greater challenge in this world.

Dr. James Dobson: You described in general terms your own experience with anger and bitterness against a person who had harmed you in the past and that it turned out to be one of the greatest victories of your life. When in that process did you begin to feel that you were doing what was right and that the Lord was accepting your offering at this point?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Okay, the answer is when I began to pray for them, and when I met it, there was an inner witness of peace and joy. It was so good and it was so wonderful. Speaking personally, I want a greater anointing on my preaching than anything. And the thought of being able to preach with more power and to have greater insight was so wonderful. And then when I'd start getting bitter and thinking about what they did, it was as though everything was shut down. But when I forgave, it was as though I could begin to see things and by the way it works in marriage. I'll tell you a story. One week in London, I was preaching all over England that week and I hadn't got to prepare a sermon.

And usually, when I was at Westminster Chapel, I'd start a Sunday morning sermon on Monday morning, but it was now Saturday and I'd got nowhere and my wife and I got into an argument that Saturday morning and it was pretty awful and I went to my chair and I started to say, "Lord, now give me something for tomorrow." I got nothing. It was 11:00, Lord, please, please help me. Nothing 1:00. Nothing 4:00. Lord, what I'm going to say tomorrow's going to go all over the world. You've got to help me. It was as though the Lord said, "Really?" He won't bend the rules for any of us.

I went to Louise, I looked at her and I said, "I'm sorry, it's all my fault." We hugged, we kissed. I went to the same chair, same pen, paper, same Bible, in 45 minutes I had everything I needed for the next day. What made the difference? You see, the Spirit came down. That's what I'm saying, the benefits of this. So it's not just that one case that brought about the book. It's something you have to live and every day or two, there's something that we're going to have to confront somebody who says something and why did they say that? You've got to live this life 24 hours a day.

Dr. James Dobson: Would you say that for those out there who feel they've lost the joy of their relationship with the Lord, that they might start by looking at their relationship with others and say, "Lord, is it here? Is this why I'm dry as a bone?"

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Exactly. I'm going to tell you, you can have people pray for you, you can go to the altar or you can go to communion, but if you are bitter before you go, you're going to be better when you come back unless you deal with it and if it happens in your heart, the joy, well, it's incalculable. The benefits are wonderful.

Dr. James Dobson: Now to repeat what you said yesterday, which is a fundamental concept here, is that you don't necessarily have to go tell the person that you forgive them because they may not be ready to receive it and that may not be what's required.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, nine out of 10 people I've ever had to forgive you could put them under a lie detector and they don't think they've done anything. And you see that shows that I've probably hurt people and I don't know it. I've had people come to me and say, "I've forgiven you for that." I said, "Whatever did I do," and I sincerely didn't know I'd hurt people. There are people that have hurt me. They don't know it. And so it's counterproductive. I sometimes say, when I preach this sermon, I say, now look, if you're convicted of this sermon when the service is over, don't go up to the person and say, "I forgive you." Because they're going to say, "For what?"

Dr. James Dobson: For what?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: And you're going to say, "Well, you know" and they're going to say, "Well, I don't." And then you're going to say, "Well, you should," and now you've got a fight on your hands.

Dr. James Dobson: There you go.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: It's got to happen in the heart. The only time you say I forgive you is when you know they want to hear it so much. Then you tell them.

Dr. James Dobson: When I was in college, and I went to a Christian college. We had chapel five days a week and I remember an occasion or two where during revival or whenever it was, a student would stand up before the 1500 people who were there and shout out loud enough for everybody to hear, "I just want Jack to know that I have been angry at him and he's done all these terrible things to me and I forgive him." And embarrassed Jack half to death. It was an inappropriate thing to do, and that's not what we are required to do.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: It's got to happen in the heart. You are in a position like God is with us and you know what it's like when two of your children aren't speaking to each other. Our heavenly Father feels that way when two of us aren't speaking to each other. And so we set him free when we forgive one another. And what you must do with the children is not to take sides but say, "Well, now I can see why you are hurt. I can see why you are hurt, but you must forgive." Yeah. As a parent, I would definitely say that, and I'll have to tell you this. I had the greatest parents in the world. I had the most wonderful father. My earliest memory of my father is seeing him on his knees for 30 minutes. He did not think of going to work without 30 minutes on his knees every morning, but for some reason this teaching, I wasn't taught it at home. I'm telling you, it's a teaching that somehow we all know it's there, but it gets swept under the carpet when it comes to application.

Dr. James Dobson: R.T., the truth of the universe is in this concept, and in this book, because you took it right out of scripture, I would like to close our program today by asking you to pray for those out there who are bitter. They've been bitter for years and it has just been a bile that has affected them for so many years and they just

can't seem to get beyond it. They can't forgive. Will you pray a prayer for us now?

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Sure.

Dr. James Dobson: Pray for all of us, for all of us need to be able to forgive. It happens to everybody, and it happens regularly because God made us very sensitive people. Now, you talk about the Holy Spirit being likened unto a dove. We are likened unto sheep and we are easily led and easily influenced and easily hurt, and all of us get wounded by the casual things that people say around us when they don't even know that they've said anything that has hurt us. And so it's a common human experience and a difficult one to get beyond. I would like you to pray for those who are going to try to do what you have said today.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Just before I pray, could I just say one thing? Imagine the person out there that's hurt more than anybody else who feels that he has the most that he has to forgive because he would say or she would say, "You don't know what I've been through." My reply is the deeper the hurt, the greater the sense of God's blessing if you can forgive that. There are people around you that don't have the potential blessing you've got because they don't have to forgive what you have to forgive, but when you have been through what you've been through and still forgive, the power of the Spirit will be double, triple in your case.

Dr. James Dobson: Pray for us.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are touched with the feeling of our weaknesses. You know our frame. You remember that we are dust, and I pray for that person who's out there right now who's been so hurt, so betrayed, abused, the object of infidelity, who's been lied about, and people believe the lies, who's been hurt by a friend. And I pray for healing in that person at this very moment. And I pray that Your Holy Spirit will come into that person's room or car or wherever they are at this moment, and You will enable that person to forgive totally. To come to the place that he or she will stop talking about what they did and just cast their burden upon the Lord and forgive as You have forgiven us because You will not tell what You've forgiven us for.

Enable that person to set that other person free, that one will not try to intimidate, that we will not let them feel guilty, that we will let them save face and protect them from their darkest secret, and that we will accept it as something we must do as long as we live. Thank You that you understand this and that You don't moralize us, but You stoop to where we are and say, "Look, I forgive you. Set that person free." And enable us all right now to pray as Jesus did on the cross. Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing, and we thank You for the joy and the peace that will come. Heal that marriage, heal that relationship, set that person free, and may healing come in these moments. In Jesus' name amen.

Dr. James Dobson: Amen. What a beautiful prayer. Dr. R.T., I don't want to patronize you or flatter you, but your book, *Total Forgiveness* is one of the most important books that I've read in recent years. It was number one in the UK in sales, and it's been a bestseller here, and everybody ought to read this book. Everybody. I think everybody needs to at least examine themselves and see if there's something here that the Lord would have them do and this book would be a real good place to start. Get it and read it and then apply it. And R.T., thank you for your influence in my life and for your ministry through the years God has used you mightily and I am just grateful for your friendship and I appreciate your being with us.

Dr. R.T. Kendall: Well, thank you for having me. God bless you.

Roger Marsh: Authentic forgiveness is truly one of life's toughest mountains to climb. Amen. It's more than the simple act of saying, "I forgive you," but rather a transformative journey that opens the door to our own freedom and spiritual renewal. Fred, you're listening to Family Talk and a classic conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and his dear friend, Dr. R.T. Kendall. The wisdom Dr. Kendall has shared these past couple of programs has given us all a fresh perspective on what true forgiveness really looks like, and perhaps more importantly, how it can set us free. His insights remind us that forgiveness isn't just about the past, it's about creating a better future for ourselves and also for those around us. Now, if you missed any part of the conversation or you know someone who would really benefit from hearing it, you can find both episodes online at [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). That's [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

Remember, you can also access these programs on your smartphone using the Dr. James Dobson Family App. And speaking of apps, the brand new JDFI multilingual app is now available for those who use Apple products and will soon be available for Android users as well. You can be encouraged with practical daily messages that prioritize God and family in every area of your life. The new multilingual app gives you convenient access to Dr. Dobson's biblically-based teachings, including brand new podcast episodes on marriage and parenting, the Dobson Marriage Podcast, and the Dobson Parenting Podcast. In addition, you'll find the popular newly remastered Dr. Dobson Minute. Now these can be personalized to your interest, saved in your library, and quickly shared with those you love. Now, the Family App is currently available on Apple devices in English and Spanish, and to get those settings straight, it will just default to your phone's language setting.

There are three additional languages that are in the works as well as an Android version, which I'm happy about, and those will be released later in 2025. Through this new JDFI multilingual app, we are seeking to reach millions of people all over the world with the good news of the gospel and strength for the marriage and parenting journeys. For more information, simply go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org) or you can find the Dr. James Dobson family multilingual app in the Apple Store right now. And by the way, if you're looking for even more great content from Family Talk, our 2024 Best of Broadcast collection is



still available. This carefully curated six-CD set features life-changing conversations with trusted experts and inspiring testimonies of God's faithfulness. We'll be happy to send you one as our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of the JDFI today.

So go online and request your copy at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org) or give us a call at 877-732-6825. Now, if you'd prefer, you can also send your gift through the mail. Our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. Well, I'm Roger Marsh. So glad that you've been with us today. On behalf of Dr. Dobson and the entire team here at the JDFI thanks so much for listening and for standing with us in prayer. 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:

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