



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Learning to Embrace Brokenness

Guest(s): Lon Solomon

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk, it's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute, supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Well welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh with a special word of thanks for everyone who made Giving Tuesday such a spectacular day here. As you recall we had a \$100,000 matching gift in place yesterday only and the response was overwhelming so for all who have made donations on Giving Tuesday this year, thank you so much for your faithful financial partnership. On today's program we continue with our best of broadcast collection and today's theme centers on brokenness. It manifests itself in countless ways from physical damage to emotional wounds to spiritual burdens that really weigh heavy on your heart.

When those unthinkable moments of tragedy strike, we often find ourselves questioning God's role, wondering why He would allow such profound suffering to enter our lives. Well during the next half hour, we are going to hear a special message featuring a conversation with Dr. James Dobson and his guest, Pastor Lon Solomon. Pastor Solomon has written a book that will serve as a backdrop for this conversation. It's called *Brokenness: How God Redeems Pain and Suffering*. Lon Solomon served for four decades as pastor of McLean Bible Church. He also spent four years advising President George W. Bush on issues affecting people with intellectual disabilities. And Pastor Solomon will be sharing with us on today's program how God has worked powerfully through his own daughter Jill's life. Jill, a young woman born with special needs. Now today's program is a classic Family Talk broadcast and was actually recorded several years ago but it's also been selected as one of our best of broadcasts for 2024 because when we re-aired it earlier this year, the response was so incredible. By the way, I'll share more about our 2024 Best of Broadcast Collection later in the program, but right now let's listen in Dr. James Dobson's conversation with Pastor Lon Solomon here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Our guest has written a book called *Brokenness*. He is Lon Solomon. He's the senior pastor of McLean Bible Church in the Virginia suburbs in Washington, D.C., where more than 10,000 people attend each weekend. He also serves on the board of Jews for Jesus and was appointed by President George W. Bush to

serve as a member of the President's committee on people with intellectual disabilities. Lon, you have written a book called *Brokenness*, just simply brokenness because as a pastor you have dealt with many broken people and there was a time in your life when you and Brenda, your wife were broken as well. What led you to get into this very difficult subject?

Lon Solomon: As a pastor, of course, you always have people coming in your office saying, "Why is this happening to me? Trying to live for the Lord. I think we're doing everything as right as we know how. There's no open sin in our life. We're not doing anything to deserve God's discipline or judgment, and yet this horrible thing has happened to us. And why would God do this to us?" I get that question all the time. So years ago as a new pastor and a young pastor, I started trying to do some biblical exploration and say, what's the answer to that question?

And I came up with a few of the ideas that lie at the heart of this book, but really what made this book a reality was that 12 years ago, God sent a little girl into my life named Jill, who as you know, Dr. Dobson is severely mentally disabled. We still change diapers at 12 years old. And she'd go outside in the cold and would freeze to death, not even know she needed to come in and put a coat on. And the 12 years that Brenda and I have been through that experience now ourselves asking some of those same questions, Lord, I'm a pastor, the best of my knowledge, I'm doing it the way I'm supposed to do it here, why in the world would you do this to us, really produced the answers in the book called *Brokenness*.

Dr. James Dobson: I want to come back to that story and that illustration, but define brokenness. This is not just depression, although depression can be pretty difficult too, and this is not just despair. Brokenness means you really are at the end of your rope. You're really at the point where you just feel like you can't go on anymore. Is there more to it than that? How would you define it?

Lon Solomon: Well, brokenness is a spiritual process. I mean, despair, depression, these are human processes, but brokenness is a spiritual process where God uses all of that, the pain, the heartache, the suffering to produce a spiritual result in our life that's good and positive and redeeming. The whole idea of the book is that suffering has a redeeming purpose in God's plan for our lives if we'll just let God work this through. E.M. Bounds, *The Power of Prayer*, he made this quote, I think this really really sums up the problem if I could read it. He said, "Men are God's method. The church is looking for better methods. God is looking for better men. What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more novel methods but men whom the Holy Spirit can use. The Holy Ghost does not come on machinery but on men. He does not anoint plans, he anoints men."

We live in a very method-driven world today. We have methods for everything from breathing in childbirth to how to beat the house in blackjack and it has affected our Christian community. We are very methods-driven as a church. Let

some church come up with a great program and suddenly they've got a huge line of people who want to take it and copy it. But you know what's interesting, Dr. Dobson? In the Bible, God has very little to say about methods. If you go to the Bible to construct a methodology for much of anything in the New Testament, you won't find it. What you will find is God talking about the quality and the character and the depth of the people that He wants leading His church. And the whole idea of the book of *Brokenness* is that to make a man or a woman of God, that God can really use, brokenness has always been a key component to getting men and women to that point. And without that process, it's really very difficult to get to the place God can use us in a mighty way.

Dr. James Dobson: You mentioned methods. I've noticed that Jesus in His healing rarely used the same approach. On one occasion He spoke a word, and on another, He touched the person, and in another, He reached down and got some dirt out of the street and spit in it and made mud out of it and put that on the blind eyes. It was always something different. So He was revealing that it's not the method, it is the faith and it is the touch of the master.

Lon Solomon: When I went to seminary, I left with the impression that if you know the Bible well and you go through the wheel illustration, prayer, witnessing, fellowship, that you'd be a powerful servant of Christ. And I had to learn something. And that is that being a powerful servant of Christ doesn't have a thing to do with that, it has to do with the ability of the Holy Spirit to flow through your life in an unhindered way. Jesus talked about this in the Bible. He said in John 12, "If a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone. But if it does die and crack open, then it produces much fruit." And the whole idea of that is that there's life inside that seed, but without cracking that hard outer shell, it can't get out.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's apply this to my introduction, the things that I said there about the person who's listening to us that's really going through it, and let's role-play together. I come into your office and I say, Pastor Solomon, I know that you've said that brokenness is a biblical concept, but I'm dying inside. I don't feel God's presence and I don't know why He's allowed me to go through this difficulty. I came out of the doctor's office reeling with the news that I have cancer of the esophagus and I'm in great difficulty. I may not survive. What in the world is God doing here? Why does He have to do this to me to get me to obey Him? I'll obey Him. What is going on here?

Lon Solomon: Well, the first thing I think you would always have to say to somebody biblically is we need to do a good inventory. Let's make sure there's not something we're doing that's sinful and wrong and offensive. Hebrews 12, where the Lord needs to discipline us. I think that's always the first thing to check out. But assuming that's true that there is nothing like that, then I think we have to say, God's out to do something grand in your life. I know you can't see it right now, but He's really out to do something marvelous in your life. He's out to bring you to the place where the only real source of trust and confidence in your life is Christ

alone, where the only thing you've got and the only thing you're relying on is Christ alone. So He's stripping all this other stuff away. You've got to trust Him and you got to stick with Him through the process.

I say in the book, everybody wants the product, nobody wants the process. Everybody wants to be a major league ball player, nobody wants to go through the off-the-field discipline it takes to get there. And in the spiritual life, everybody wants God to use their life, but most of us don't want the process it takes to get there. And if you look in the Bible now, let me just give you some Bible characters. I mean, think of Moses, David, Joseph, Job, Peter, all of these people, and even down through church history, whether it's Hudson Taylor or Moody or Fanny Crosby, these folks all went through intense periods of suffering, pain, loss before they emerged as the man or the woman that God shook the world with.

And see, that's not being taught much today in modern Christian circles. And so what happens is people make a prayer when they come to Christ. They say, "Lord, I really want you to use me. God, use my life, make a difference through me." Then God says, "Okay, I'm going to answer that prayer. I'm going to take you through a brokenness experience so I can really use you." But our problem is because often we don't understand what's happening, we don't realize God's trying to answer our prayer and it takes believing the promises of God Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's go back to the birth of your daughter. Was that your first child?

Lon Solomon: Our fourth.

Dr. James Dobson: Fourth child. And the doctor came in and told you that she was mentally retarded or did you not know it then?

Lon Solomon: No, what happened was she started having seizures at three months old and they got worse and worse and eventually completely out of control. She's probably had 5 or 6,000 grand mals in her life and continues to. Less now. But the level of mental retardation and brain injury that occurred has just been profound. The promise of God I was referring to is of course Romans 8:28, "All things worked together for good to those who love the Lord." Brenda and I struggled in those early years. We felt like we were-

Dr. James Dobson: A lot of tears?

Lon Solomon: We felt like we were at the bottom of this big black hole and there was just no place to go. And we kept saying, "Lord, how can anything good come out of this? Anything good?" But you know Dr. Dobson, the truth is you only have two choices. You either trust God or doubt God. That's it. And we just made the decision-

Dr. James Dobson: There's no other alternative.

Lon Solomon: There's nothing else there.

Dr. James Dobson: You let Him go, there's no other plan.

Lon Solomon: And we just said, "Even though this is as hard as anything we've ever faced, we are going to trust God." I don't want to imply that was always easy, there were some days we hung on by our fingertips, but we said, "We know God redeems pain. We know God has a purpose here. We don't know what it is, but we're going to trust Him to use this somehow." And what came out of that was a deeper understanding of what God was really trying to do in our lives. He was trying to bring us to ground zero where Jesus was all we had. And when you get there, you realize Jesus is all you need, and suddenly God can then start rebuilding your life now and really using you for His glory because He stripped everything else away and the spirit can flow. And it took us years to really begin to see the positive side.

Dr. James Dobson: And the other positive aspect to this is that from it has come a ministry at McLean Bible Church to those who are disabled or handicapped in one way or another or mentally disabled. You have one of the greatest outreaches to those in that kind of need and their families that I've ever seen. And it sort of came out of this, did it not?

Lon Solomon: No, it totally came out of this. That's one of the many wonderful things that came out of this. But if I could be a little bit transparent here. When I first came to McLean Bible Church, my goal was to build a big church. Now, it was for maybe of some good reasons, but for a lot of bad reasons. A lot of it was about me. A lot of it was about the prestige and the notoriety and the public acclaim of leading a big church. And I admit that now. And God never-

Dr. James Dobson: You're not alone in that, by the way.

Lon Solomon: Well, God never really honored that very much. After 10 or 12 years, we were still just putting along. And then he sent Jill in my life. She so shattered my life and my wife's life, I mean shattered beyond what I could even describe in words that after a while I didn't care anymore about how big the church got. I didn't care anymore about how many people came, but all of a sudden it started becoming more about Christ and a lot less about me. And the fascinating thing is that all of a sudden people started coming. It's not that we did a thing different. We didn't do anything different. I preached the same way and people just started flocking in. And what I really feel happened is God... I was a lot like Moses, God had to break a bunch of stuff in me before He could trust me and use me.

You know what? If you were to say to me now, let's go back 12 years and I'll give you a choice Lon. You can have a normal healthy daughter and McLean Bible

Church and the work of God will continue just like it did then putting along or you can have Jill and what's happened since then with all the ministry. Take a choice. That would be a very hard choice, but I would like to hope that I would make the right choice, which would be to say, God, send me Jill just the way she was because-

Dr. James Dobson: Especially because you are convinced that it was not a mistake that she was born.

Lon Solomon: Of course, it wasn't.

Dr. James Dobson: That was God's gift to you.

Lon Solomon: It was. And God needed to break me. He needed to break me before He could use me.

Dr. James Dobson: I don't like being broken.

Lon Solomon: Well, nobody does.

Dr. James Dobson: That's uncomfortable.

Lon Solomon: I don't think Moses liked it.

Dr. James Dobson: It is difficult.

Lon Solomon: I don't think Peter liked it after he denied the Lord three times. Nobody likes it. That's what we said. The process, nobody wants the process. But you know what? The product now, I'm a better man because of this. I believe I'm a better pastor, a better husband, and father. So even though I would never want to go through it again, humanly speaking, I would not want to go back to where I was. And this is what the book's about. It's about the fact of encouraging people who are going through the tough times like you said, Dr. Dobson, that there really is redeeming value here. If we'll just let God do what He needs to do, we'll come out on the other side useful to God and intimate with God in a way that only the doorway of brokenness can get us into.

Dr. James Dobson: So often instead though there's that pushback against God, there's that, I call it the betrayal barrier where you feel God has let you down and you're angry at Him and stay angry with Him for years. He can't work through that, when you don't go with it and let Him do what He would do.

Lon Solomon: And you know why people don't go with it? Because they don't understand it. If we would teach this and explain it to people more, if I'd have been able to say 12 years ago, "Okay, I understand what God's doing here. I don't like it, but I understand what He's trying to do to me. I'm going to let Him do it." But if you don't understand, you either get angry or you fall into false guilt where you start

saying, "What's wrong with me? Maybe I'm not even really a believer. Maybe I'm doing something..." And you just cycle down, as you said, into depression and discouragement. A lot of it's just lack of information.

I might add, I don't believe God always redeems everything on this side of the grave. People have asked me when they've read or heard about this, they say, "Well, yeah, but what about Jill? It's great God did all this for you and for your church, but what about this poor little girl who's had to be, in their mind, God's pawn in all of this? How is that fair to her?" Well, my answer is God doesn't settle everything on this side. And I believe on the other side because Jill has been willing to live the life that God gave her, God's going to settle up with her on the other side.

Dr. James Dobson: I believe that.

Lon Solomon: And that there are going to be a lot of people who are going to be glad they served Jill on this side when we get to the other side. And God never broke anybody with success and He's trying to answer our prayer. And so often because we don't understand it, we end up being our own worst enemy. And the other thing I think we forget is that God's grace is there in these moments when we need it. You don't get dying grace until you're dying. You don't get bad neighbor grace until you got one. You don't get getting fired grace until you get your pink slip. And I think what happens is a lot of times we look forward and we think about what could happen and we get paralyzed with fear because we're looking at the situation, but the grace isn't there yet.

Even though this has been the toughest thing in my life, I just have to say the grace of God was there when we needed it. I mean it wasn't easy, but 12 years later, we're all still standing and all still walking with Christ. And when God decides to break you, He sends brokenness grace to be there for you, and it's really okay. This whole idea that a lot of people, we really don't understand what God's doing and that makes the problem worse. That's really why I wrote the book because I think the book explains what's often happening, how it's going to happen, how to go through it, what's going to happen on the other side that's going to make this worth it.

I mean, I wish I had known all of that when we started. It would've made our whole experience make a lot more sense and would've made it easier for us to pray and work our way and trust God through it. And that's really why I wrote the book is for people out there who are saying, "What in the world is going on and I don't get it, and this is horrible." I want the book to bring some perspective to people so they go, "Well, it's still hard, but at least I understand what God's trying to do to me."

Dr. James Dobson: The tendency in a moment like that is to think God's lost control. This shouldn't have happened. Why did He allow this to happen? He's not paying attention or

He's gone or He doesn't love me or He doesn't have the power I thought He did or He's out to get me or I've sinned or something-

Lon Solomon: And nothing could be farther from the truth. He has total control and knows exactly what He's doing.

Dr. James Dobson: The title of the book is *Brokenness* by Pastor Lon Solomon. This grew out of your own pastoral experience and your own personal experience.

Lon Solomon: That's right. The whole idea at the end of this is to challenge us as followers of Christ to aspire for higher ground. The wonderful hymn Higher Ground. But I'm so afraid that we've fallen into the murky shadowlands of Churchianity that we're failing to challenge followers of Christ to really aspire to higher ground in their walk with Christ. The price is worth it. Let's aspire for higher ground to really let Christ walk with us in intimacy and reality and not just live our life at 50%.

Dr. James Dobson: Would it be accurate to say brokenness comes to everybody sooner or later?

Lon Solomon: No, I don't think so, Dr. Dobson, because I think you got to want it. You got to ask God and tell him you're a candidate. And most of us do that when we say, Lord, use me. We don't realize what we're really asking for.

Dr. James Dobson: Despair will come at one point or another.

Lon Solomon: Trouble, heartaches, but don't forget, getting trouble to brokenness involves a willingness on our part to let God have his way in our life. And it's that level of surrender and saying, "Lord, I don't know what you're doing, but whatever you need to do, just do it." That's what enables God to turn trouble into brokenness.

Dr. James Dobson: Pastor Lon Solomon, great friend, thank you for being back with us today.

Lon Solomon: Thanks for the privilege of letting me come.

Dr. James Dobson: We will drop in on you there at McLean Bible Church one of these days. The Lord is blessing it and great things are happening, and I thank you for your love for the Lord.

Lon Solomon: Thank you, Dr. Dobson.

Roger Marsh: You know when life gets tough it's not always easy to trust God's plan, but that's exactly when we need to lean on Him the most. We hope that Dr. Dobson's conversation with Pastor Lon Solomon has encouraged you today and strengthen you and your faith journey as well. By the way, if you'd like to dive deeper into Pastor Solomon's message, be sure to check out his book entitled *Brokenness*. You can head over to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk to learn more about his ministry and that book.

By the way right now some exciting news to share with you regarding our best of broadcast collection. The 2024 Best of Broadcast Collection from Family Talk is here. It's available as a six-CD set or a digital download. And we'll be happy to send you a copy of that collection as our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of the ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute today. Now when you contact us, go to drjamesdobson.org and request the 2024 Best of Broadcast Collection. Or you can call us at 877-732-6825. This would be a great addition to your personal library, to share with a friend or even to give as a thoughtful gift at Christmastime. And by the way, remember that we are now in end of year mode which means some faithful special listeners of the broadcast have put up a matching gift that will match your donation dollar for dollar now through December 31st. So when you contact us at drjamesdobson.org or by calling 877-732-6825, request your copy of the 2024 Best of Broadcast Collection, make your best gift of any amount in support of our ministry and that gift will be doubled. Again go to drjamesdobson.org or keep in mind you can 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. That's P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip, 80949.

Well I'm Roger Marsh, may God continue to richly bless you and your family as you grow stronger and deeper in your relationship with Him. And be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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