



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Cultivating Deeper Connections in a Lonely World – Part 2

Guest(s): Becky Harling

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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 once again to another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh sitting in the co-host chair today. We're a broadcast division, of course, of the James Dobson Family Institute, and joined for another conversation about what it means to cultivate connection in a lonely world. Our guest is author, speaker, and podcaster, Becky Harling. Becky and her husband, Steve, have raised four children together, and they're still married and smiling, which is always a good sign. They have a growing number of grandchildren and make their home in the Colorado area. And the new book is called *Cultivating Deeper Connections in a Lonely World*, and that will once again be the topic of our conversation. Becky Harling, welcome back to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.
- Becky Harling: Hey, it's great to be back with you. Thanks, Roger.
- Roger Marsh: I love this conversation because we were talking in our previous discussion about what it means to cultivate deeper connections in a lonely world. And you talked a lot about the benefits and necessity of listening, of having a humble spirit. And we were talking a little bit last time as we were wrapping up about the world of criticism that we live in too. Talk about how ... I mean, just kind of give us a 60 second overview of how social media and a pandemic exacerbated things and the fact that people think they're a lot smarter than they actually are, and even Christians aren't quite as gracious as perhaps we should be, is all fueling an epidemic now that the U.S. Surgeon General says half of the population is experiencing loneliness.
- Becky Harling: Yeah. And social media is not helping us. I mean, sure, it serves a purpose, but we got to be really careful. What I'm finding, and I don't know about you, Roger, but I'm finding that a lot of people will say things on social media that they would never say in a face-to-face conversation.
- Roger Marsh: Agreed. Agreed.
- Becky Harling: They are criticizing people. They're criticizing everything under the sun. They criticize churches, they criticize pastors, they criticize their neighbors, schools,

politicians. I mean, the list is endless. They criticize anybody that doesn't agree with them. But God calls us not to be critical. He calls us to be discerning. So we have to discern the difference between what's right and what's wrong. And our guide for that is the Bible, right? So we discern what's right and wrong. That doesn't mean that we start scolding everybody out there. Even if they're living in something that we would discern as sinful lifestyle. Our example is always Jesus. You mentioned in the last session, the woman at the well, according ... We don't know what her whole story was. We know she'd been married five times. We know she was living with a man. We don't know her situation, but Jesus doesn't scold her. He's gentle with her. And eventually, what I love is she becomes the first missionary.

Roger Marsh:

Right. Right. I mean, it's a beautiful story of redemption right in that moment because we have to come face to face with our sin when we come to the cross. There's no question about that. He doesn't back away from that, but at the same time, He presents the gospel, the true salvation message that she needs in such a way that, like you said, she goes running back to her village and saying, "Hey, I've seen this guy. You've got to see this guy." And that's all we are really trying to accomplish. And yet at the same time, we're living in a smartphone era where a lot of overly educated, but overly academic, but underly educated. I think people are taking it to heart that, "Well, I know better than you, so therefore I'm right, you're wrong." And I've gotten them confirmation bias is strong. I found a whole bunch of other people who agree with me.

And since you're that way, Becky, I just couldn't possibly agree with you. So now I have to cancel you. And you're saying, "Whoa, wait a minute." I mean, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. I mean, there's a big difference between repenting of your sinful ways, you, and telling somebody else pound sand. This is a phenomenon you were mentioning in our previous conversation, some great examples from your family of women who have really modeled this for you, what deeper connection looks like. Talk about the difference between men who are lonely and women who are lonely. I would imagine it's not necessarily all one-sided, but it does seem to favor women more than men in terms of loneliness. Is that what your research has found?

Becky Harling:

You know, not really actually, Roger. I'm finding that men are just as lonely. Originally, it's interesting because originally when I wrote this book, I wrote it for women, and so a lot of the stories in there are about women. But what I'm finding is as men are reading it, they're saying, "Becky, you are absolutely right. And I'm discovering as a man, I'm really lonely because I've been so focused on my career and building my career and rising the corporate ladder that I haven't cultivated the deep friendships. And I don't have men in my life who I can really be real with." And so it's been an interesting journey to write this book and then watch it play out in the world. So I think probably women and men are both lonely, perhaps for different reasons, but I think either way we've got to focus on connection. One of the things that I think that is robbing our connection that we haven't talked about yet relative to the smartphone is that our attention span has gone way downhill. In fact, I read one study, Roger, this is going to

shock you, that says we now have the attention span of less than seven seconds, which is shorter than a goldfish. I mean, we're in trouble. And so we are so distracted. In the book, I tell a funny story about when our son was a teenager and we were in this store called Candy Kitchen on the boardwalk on the East Coast. And the girls were looking to buy Beanie Babies, which was all the craze back then if you remember. And our son, this store had these huge plexiglass containers of candy. And our son was playing with this little rubber suction ball and all of a sudden he pulled it.

And it was something like out of a Lily Hevesh video of Domino Rally. One candy container fell over on another fell over on another. Thousands of candies went all over the floor. It was epic. It's the most epic candy fall of all time. And I just got the giggles. It was the funniest thing I'd ever seen. My husband was like, "We'll pay you for the candy." I mean, seriously, we had ruined their store and the lady at Candy Kitchen just said, "Get out." And we still laugh about it today, but the point of that story is distraction breeds disaster. It breeds disaster in a Candy Kitchen, but it breeds disaster in your relationships. So let me challenge you. If you're lonely and you're with somebody, is your smartphone on the table at lunch? Are you checking email? If you're on the playground with your kids, are you focused on your kids and other moms on the playground?

Or are you scrolling Instagram and TikTok and YouTube and all of that? At the dinner table when your spouse is trying to talk to you, are you saying, "Oh, just a minute, honey. I got to check this email. I just heard a ding come through on my smartwatch." I mean, we are so distracted and Jesus is calling us back to really focus on people.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. It's critical we do that. Becky Harling is with me today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We're talking about her brand-new book called *Cultivating Deeper Connections in a Lonely World*. And Becky, I couldn't help but wonder, I mean, you were talking about this happening with your son young age and now I realize that in the world that we live in with the Ring cameras and all the different cell phone video technology that we have, that whole situation might have turned completely differently for the owner of the candy shop if the video had been released on TikTok because

Becky Harling: Oh, that's true.

Roger Marsh: I mean, when you think about it, if it goes on YouTube and it gets millions of views or this, that, the other thing, they can monetize it. I bring that up only to say, this is part of how culture has changed and how our brains have been rewired. The currency, you were talking about the Jonathan Hate book and the anxious generation, the currency of the culture now is attention. And it used to be when we were raising our kids to be the kind of kids we wanted, it was, well, you got to be intentional about spending time with them, really investing in them. But when the attention span of adults is seven seconds. And I want to thank everyone who's listening to and watching this program, because we have a YouTube channel as well, and you're sitting through the entire 26 minute

conversation. Thank you for doing that because you are the exception rather than the rule. We'll put out a two minute reel that's an excerpt from this and put it up on the socials and hundreds of thousands of people will go for it. And then they just, because I can give you 90 seconds, I can give you a minute, I can give you two minutes, I can't give you 26.

And Becky, you've written a book that is well worth reading every page, and yet I'm sure you run into the same thing where someone says, "Just give me a pull quote, give me a meme to change my life because I don't have the attention span anymore. I don't have the time." And that's one of those things you write about in the book where technology can be a benefit to helping to cultivate deeper relationships, but it can also be a real burden, if you will.

Becky Harling: Yeah, it can be. And I think, okay, if you can only focus for seven seconds, how does that impact your relationship with God? Because I want to be all in my relationship with God. So I want to be able to spend an hour or an hour and a half with the Lord in the morning. And if I can't, I have to kind of analyze what in the world am I doing with my time that is robbing me from the relationship that I need the most? If I can't find time to spend with my husband, what am I doing with my life that is so important? And so I think these questions are good to ask. They might be a little uncomfortable at times, but they're really good to ask.

Roger Marsh: Talk to the mom, Becky, who is saying, "Okay, but you don't know my kids. They are so active." I mean, we have six grandchildren and two of them we have nicknames Search and Destroy because they go everywhere. I borrowed that line from Stuart and Jill Briscoe, but it's so applicable with Zipora and Nazareth because she likes to search things out. She's always gone on a mission and he just is busy. And so he just runs into stuff. I don't know half the time he's even trying to knock stuff over, whatever. He just keeps going. He's 2 and he's trying to figure it out. But we're trying to be purposeful with them. We're trying to encourage their parents to be ... With the short attention spans, and there's always a screen, there's always a video, this, that, and the other thing. What are some ways that we can establish some connection?

Because at the end of the day, what you're saying is, if you're feeling lonely, chances are your loneliness is because technology's gotten in the way or a critical spirit's gotten in the way. And you can kind of overcome that loneliness by being intentional with whom you spend time with, whether it's kids, grandkids, or good friends.

Becky Harling: Yeah. And so for parents, I mean, we have 14 very active grandchildren. I love each of them. I can tell you who their friends are. Some of them love sports and we have a whole mob in soccer. Some are playing golf. I mean, they all have different activities that they love, but it's wise as parents to just spend time playing with them. Get down on the floor, turn off the iPads for goodness sake and play restaurant with them if they're little or if they're older, kick a soccer ball with them. We have some grandchildren that have tremendous energy and they were like little tornadoes when they were toddlers. But I love that energy

because that's the way God's wired them, but all the more reason, get them outside. They need to be outside playing with you, play hide and seek, play tag, throw a football with them, kick a soccer ball with them. If you've got little girls that like to do chalk, do calk with them. But we've got to bring back play without all the screen time because kids that are on screens all the time, then they go to school and they don't have the attention span. Read to your kids. Let them imagine what the story is supposed to look like.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, that's very interesting. And I love the fact that you were talking about what I would say good discipleship and not once did you mention Bible lessons, not much did you mention conjugating Greek verbs and things like that. It was just basically be with them, be present, be engaged, be the kind of person that they want to be with. And when you do that, all of a sudden you begin to realize, "Hey, you know that empty, lonely feeling that I had in my heart, God's filling that up because now there's a purpose. Now there's a meaningful connection." And that's what you're talking about here. It's all about cultivating connections. I mean, in a world that has gotten so lonely and not just superficial connections, but the deep meaningful ones.

Becky Harling: Yeah. Recently I was privileged to be able to speak to the Legacy Coalition, which is a coalition for grandparents and one of the things that I said is that the strength of your connection with your grandkids is going to determine the measure of your influence on your grandkids' lives. And so if we want to be able to disciple our grandkids, we got to be connected with them. If we want to disciple our kids, we've got to be connected with them. And so as parents, if you're always on your cell phone, if you're always checking email, if you're always in meetings, you're going to miss out. So put it away. Nothing is that urgent that you have to answer it in the next 10 seconds.

Roger Marsh: I was at a music event in Nashville many years ago and it was a group of songwriters who were there and they were asking everyone, "Hey, before we get into this little group where we're going to play these songs, everyone plays silence, your cell phones, if not, just turn them all the way off." And one of the songwriters got up and he had written a few songs that I think, I don't remember which ones they were, like he wrote *The Gambler* for Genny Rogers or something like that. He had some major hits and he said, "I can assure you that there have only been four times in my life when there was a call that I got that was so important. I told everybody else, hold on a second, I got to take this." And it was for each one of the ones where he found out this song had sold a zillion copies. He said, "Every other time, what's more important is right in front of me, as opposed to what potentially might be coming in."

And when you think about the way these things are piped into us in the media, "Oh, you looked at this website, then you might like this video." And all of a sudden it just becomes, I think they call it zombie scrolling, where you're looking at your hand. My wife sometimes, I do a lot of research on my phone. She goes, "Your phone's your third hand. You do realize that." And I'm like, when I get to that point with her, I'm like, "This goes on the charging station. We need a date.

We need to do something if she's referring to it that way." But I love what you're saying about this connection because for all the horrible qualities we're having, social media can be a good catalyst for knowledge and discernment, discipline, discipling, it's a question of how you use it. And I love the fact that what you're saying is if you want to cultivate deeper connections, you have to control the media. It can't control you.

Becky Harling: Yeah. And it's interesting with the whole smartphone, I mean, and I have one and my husband has one. I mean, right, we all have one, but all of the apps have been designed to be addictive. So that's our problem.

Roger Marsh: It's like the free snacks at the restaurant, right? You want some chips and salt? Oh sure, that's great. It's designed to get you thirsty, so you'll drink something.

Becky Harling: Yeah. Yeah. So we just have to be careful with it. Don't throw the whole thing out. If you're connecting with people you went to high school with, great but then follow up with an actual phone call or go visit them. Don't let it stop with social media.

Roger Marsh: Let's talk about prayer because I know that in the final chapter of your new book, you talk about how important it is to find what you call your prayer people. And that's something that I think a lot of people, it's a new concept to younger adults, but for those of us who know better, maybe that church hurt kind of led you to, "Hey, I'm not going to be so open about sharing some of my prayer concerns with other people." But you really stressed that in the book. Talk about why it's important to have prayer people in your life.

Becky Harling: Yeah. I don't know how you do life without prayer people. I have one friend who I mentioned in the book and we met each other years ago, like over 30 years ago when we were raising our kids and our girls were toddlers and we began praying together then. And then since that time, she lived overseas and I moved and she moved, but we always stayed in touch and we always would share prayer requests with each other. Now we both live in Colorado Springs. She lives here half the year and half the year in Phoenix, but we still pray together on the phone. I'll get a text from her early in the morning, "Hey, are you up?" Or I'll text her, "Are you up?" And I get on my knees in my house and she gets on her knees in her house and now we pray over 24 grandkids together. But the depth of that friendship has gone so deep because we've become real with each other. Now it takes time to develop those relationships. But the thing about prayer is as you're both on your knees, I like to get on my knees when I pray. So if you're able to, as you're both coming before the Father, your hearts are moving closer to God and they're moving closer to each other. My husband has a dear friend, he's both of our friend, but there are a couple in California and Steve will say, "Man, I just got to call Greg because we need to pray together over this." And prayer draws you closer together in friendships. And so no matter where you are in your journey, if you're single and you're a career person, find some friends that you can pray with from your church. If you're young, married, and

you've got little kiddos, man, you need prayer. Don't go to Google first, go to your prayer people first.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. I got this AI response and that's good enough for me. It's like no.

Becky Harling: Yeah. I mean, we need prayer because that's our connection with God. And as we're connecting with God and each other, we grow closer to each other and grow closer to God at the same time. So your prayer people are everything.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, they really are. And I love the vulnerability you're talking about with finding prayer people, but also something that doesn't always get a positive nod in the church is sometimes you'll approach somebody about prayer and the first response is, no. I don't want to open myself up to you or no, I pray on my own. I'm fine. And I wonder how many opportunities for evangelism, real evangelism or in discipleship even that we miss out on simply because are the first response where ... I would imagine, Becky, you're running into people are saying, "Boy, I'm trying to reach out to these folks and some of them aren't really willing to open up to be vulnerable or be humble."

Becky Harling: So then you know that those people aren't going to be your closest, deepest friends, but you can still pray for them. It's interesting whenever I've asked somebody, "Can I pray for you?" They've never said no. If I ask them to pray with me, they might say no, but they're always willing to respond.

Roger Marsh: Well yeah, even unbelievers are like, "Yeah, sure, go ahead."

Becky Harling: Totally. Yeah. They don't know if it's going to make a difference, but sure, why not? I'll try it. So I think we just have to be discerning. You can get to know people, don't go up to a total stranger and say, "Hey, you want to be my prayer partner?" Because they probably will say no. But if you've gotten to know them a little and you know you have similar desires to grow closer to God, then you make the ask. So you just got to be wise and not awkward about it.

Roger Marsh: Well, there's that wisdom thing again. Everybody has so much knowledge. We're kind of in short supply in the wisdom department, aren't we? Well, I appreciate this book so much. Becky Harling is the author of the book, *Cultivating Deeper Connections in a Lonely World*. We have a link for the book up at drjamestobson.org. Becky, what was the big revelation for you? I mean, I love to ask this question because like you mentioned earlier, you wrote this book primarily for women. You're hearing from a lot of guys who were saying, "Hey, I have the loneliness thing going on too." When you got to the end of the manuscript and this book was going to get published, was there one thing that you went, "Wow, I didn't know that about me, or I didn't think we were going to land at that conclusion in this area." What was the big revelation for you?

Becky Harling: I think for me, the biggest revelation in my life is I have been a person who has been an achiever, right? I graduated high school in three years, I've written 16 books, not that that's that great, but I mean

Roger Marsh: That's a lot of work.

Becky Harling: It's always about accomplishment. And it was good for me to say to myself, "You know what? I don't have to be in a hurry all the time." Because with achievement comes this internal rush and I'm like, "Why am I rushing? There's nothing that I have to be in a rush to do today." And if I'm going to have the deeper connections, I have to slow down. And that was the biggest revelation for me.

Roger Marsh: So that whole busyness is next to godliness thing had to go by the wayside. And it's too easy, right? I mean, you have people asking you to speak. You've got publishers asking you to write, and I'm sure there was a part of you that after a while you get into that rhythm and, "Okay, this is what God wants me to do." And to do that work and then have the realization that God's telling you, "Well, maybe I don't want you spending that much time on that." But you become that conduit for each of us to be able to see your life and be an example. And I appreciate you modeling the humility and the non-critical spirit that you write about in your new book. *Cultivating Deeper Connections in a Lonely World*, the brand-new book by Becky Harling up at drjamesdobson.org. Becky, thank you for your honesty and humility and vulnerability in writing this book. You're helping a lot of people with the ministry that you and Steve continue to engage in. Thanks so much for being with us today and for the past couple of programs here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Becky Harling: Hey, Roger, thanks for having me. It's been a joy.

Roger Marsh: Well, we certainly appreciated having this conversation with Becky Harling today here on Dr. James Dobson's family talk. Her brand new book is called *Cultivating Deeper Connections in a Lonely World*. And I really appreciated Becky's honesty during our conversation, especially her insight that the strength of your connection with someone determines the measure of your influence in their life. That's definitely worth sitting in for a minute. Today here on Family Talk, I want to encourage you to go to jdfi.net if you missed any part of the conversation today, or if you'd like to share part one with a friend or a loved one who could use some encouragement, you'll also find information about Becky's new book, *Cultivating Deeper Connections in a Lonely World* there as well. Again, go to jdfi.net. Well, conversations like the one you just heard reach families all across America every single day because listeners like you make these broadcasts possible.

Every broadcast, every resource, every letter of encouragement that goes out from the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is the direct result of someone who decided that strong families and biblical truth are worth investing in. Your generous gift of any amount helps us continue introducing people to the gospel

of Jesus Christ, defending the sanctity of human life, and equipping parents and couples with wisdom that they can trust. If you'd like to partner with us, call a member of our constituent care team right now at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

And in these closing moments, a final reminder for today that the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute and the Herzog Foundation have launched a national essay contest for middle school and high school students. As America approaches her 250th anniversary, that's coming up this July 4th, we're inviting young people all across the country to reflect on how faith shaped the founding of our nation and how God is calling them to carry those principles into the future.

Cash prizes are \$1,000 for the grand prize for the middle school category and \$2,500 for the high school category. Now keep in mind though, the submission deadline is one week from today, Thursday, April 30th. For more information, go to drjamesdobson.org/USA250. That's drjamesdobson.org/USA250. You'll also find that same information at jdfi.net.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for 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.

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