



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Gift of Limitations

Guest(s): Sara Hagerty

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and on today's program I'll be sliding into the co-host seat here to talk about a very, very important topic with a very special guest.

Now, there are certain limitations that we have in life, certain parameters, that we all have to live within every day, and the ones that make sense to us are fairly easy to deal with. For example, you have a certain amount of money in your bank account, right? If you don't have enough to spend on a certain item, then you just won't spend it. I mean, that all makes sense. Also, depending on your health or the level of physical fitness you have, you can only hike for so long in a day. I know that because I had open-heart surgery six years ago, and hiking's a little tougher for me some days than others.

Most of us are probably pretty good with the limitations that we have to deal with on a daily basis, but what happens to those long-term, larger limitations that really seem to kind of hold you back in your spiritual life and other areas of your relationships? Well, on today's edition of Family Talk, we're going to bring in a special guest, Sara Hagerty, to talk about her brand-new book called *The Gift of Limitations* and how these can be so important and practical in our everyday lives.

Sara Hagerty is a best-selling author. She's written books, including *Unseen*, *Adore*, and *Every Bitter Thing is Sweet*. Sara is married to her husband, Nate, and together they have seven children. And even that is a story about limitations being exceeded that we'll talk about later here on the program. But first, though, welcome to the broadcast, Sara Hagerty. Dr. Dobson and his wife Shirley send you their warm regards.

Sara Hagerty: Wonderful. Thank you, Roger. Thank you for having me.

Roger Marsh: Well, I want to get into this conversation because, first of all, Sara, I really love the title of this book. I mean, *The Gift of Limitations*. It's interesting. When you think about who God is and the times that we'll go to church and hear a sermon about the abundance of God, or I think of that one passage of Scripture where we are blessed exceeding abundantly far beyond what we could ever ask or imagine. Then somebody comes in and says, "Well, now, wait a minute. There's some limitations here," and some pastors might even say that's actually sinful to suggest.

Why do you say that limitations are actually a gift?

Sara Hagerty: Well, we do serve a God whose son slept and got tired and thirsty, and so in some ways we see some of the wrestle in Scripture that there are limits even that God allowed his son to experience. And so, we, as humans ... I think we have in our culture around us these messages that tell us we can overcome, we can be in five places at once, we can do three things at once, and yet we live lives where our bodies break down, where we weary, where we can't actually complete the six tasks we might be trying to do at once.

And so, I think so many of us are actually really frustrated with our lives and maybe not knowing what to do with those frustrations we keep trying to overcome, thinking isn't that the Christian life that we are overcomers? And we forget that Jesus got thirsty.

Roger Marsh: He had those same needs, and he had those physical limitations that we all do, and yet his gift to us of eternal life is so appealing. When was it, Sara, that the Holy Spirit tapped your heart, that you made that decision to place your faith in Him?

Sara Hagerty: I was 15 and at a Young Life camp, actually. I was introduced to Jesus at a Young Life camp in Michigan in the bitter cold November under the starry sky where we were given 20 minutes to really consider the gospel message that had been presented over a weekend. And I came home and wrote in red ink on a little notebook where I said, "This is my new relationship with Jesus Christ. November 13th."

Roger Marsh: Wow. Wow. You remember those days, right? I remember May 1st, 1981. I mean, same thing for me. And of 19. And I had grown up in the church. Did you grow up in the church?

Sara Hagerty: I did. I did. We had a bible in our family room. I was definitely familiar with Jesus, but it wasn't until that time that I thought this is for me, and he's reaching in to invite me in to engage in a personal relationship with him.

Roger Marsh: Now, you talk about having that family bible and having a family that was a praying family. You write about your dad in this book, *The Gift of Limitations*.

And help us, our listeners, understand a little bit more about his story and what he had to overcome to help give you a better life than he had.

Sara Hagerty: My dad was just ... He, himself, was an overcomer. I mean, if there was a challenge, he was up for it. I remember the stories of him, when I was a young girl, hiking the Grand Canyon without a plan and a Diet Coke in his hand.

Roger Marsh: Oh, my gosh.

Sara Hagerty: I know. Can you believe he even lived? He just did it. That was my dad. And he made ripples in our community, really fighting for kids who were impoverished and needed a second chance at high school. And yet when I got into my high school years, my dad's body began to break down, and I started to watch this man that was just such a champion and an overcomer face his own limitations. And that's really around the same time that I asked Jesus into my heart, and I didn't know at the time that the ... It was a long 10 or 15-year journey of watching my dad slowly deteriorate and then die relatively young. That his story would be such a part of my story, seeing that even the overcomers actually come up against their limitations and what we do with that, what we do when we face the things that we resent, that hinder us, that keep us from the big dreams in our life, actually is maybe more the making of us than fulfilling the dream.

Roger Marsh: Boy, and so interesting when people think about the accomplishment. I mean, there's such a focus put on the people. We just had the Olympic Games, and my wife and I really enjoyed watching the competition. We really didn't like it when it was all on an app. You sit there and kind of jump forward.

There were so many award ceremonies. Well, the award ceremony is great, but we really want to see the race. We want to see the struggle and all these runners coming from 20 meters down to catch the guy at the finish line. It seemed like that happened four or five times. I'm sure it must've been kind of bittersweet for you watching, especially the running part, because you write about in your book *The Gift of Limitations*, actually there was a race you were running in at one point that actually showed you some of-

Sara Hagerty: Didn't turn out like that.

Roger Marsh: Right. That's not exactly the gold-medal performance here. Would you care to share that story with me?

Sara Hagerty: It sticks in my brain. It was 2008, and I was running the Charlottesville Women's Four-Miler. It's just a local race, but I had run it before, and I knew my time, and so I actually thought I think I might be able to win this. And so, I enlisted a friend to train me for the summer, and I was really focused, and I knew the time that I needed to win based on the previous year's scores, but also it was an unusually

cool summer in Charlottesville, Virginia. I had been training in 70-degree weather.

Well, the race day came, and it was 85 degrees. And we line up at the starting line, and I look, and I see some new faces. I mean, like I said, this is a local race, so you kind of know who to expect. And I learned afterward that these were Olympic trialers who just came out to run the race. Isn't that wild?

Here I am with my splits on my time and determined. I mean, this is just kind of my personality. At that season of my life, if there was a hurdle, I was going to overcome it. I was my daddy's daughter. And so, we start this race, and I'm watching my times and trying to keep up with these women, kind of not registering that they were a different caliber of runner.

Roger Marsh: Right. Different training.

Sara Hagerty: And about, I don't know, two, three miles into the race, I started experiencing what I now know were the symptoms of a heat stroke, but I just ignored them.

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Sara Hagerty: I collapsed near the finish line. It ended up being sort of potentially a beautiful story. My husband picked me up and carried me across the finish line. Because of the Olympics this year, we went back and looked at my time, and I did come in 11th place still after having been carried across the finish line, but the heat stroke changed my running forever.

And what's interesting is, as I looked at the psychological profile of people who have heat strokes, it's essentially that their body is giving them all these signs to stop, but they ignore them. And, to me, that became such a picture of my life in God. That there are times where God allows my body to give me signs to slow down. My headaches. My tiredness. My fatigue. My snappiness at my children, and I have this proclivity to ignore them when, in reality, when I am weak, he is strong. And that notion from Corinthians is very hard-lived.

Roger Marsh: When you talk about *The Gift of Limitations*, which is the title of your book, and a lot of people don't see limitations as a gift, but I think the reason we kind of eschew them is because, first of all, you kind of have this Western mentality that says, "Be self-made. Take your own destiny into your own hands." But at the same time, too, we don't realize your car has an accelerator and a brake pedal. You what I mean? There's a time when you're supposed to accelerate and a time that you're supposed to stop.

And moving forward ... Because you didn't lose your competitive edge when you had the heat stroke. I mean, obviously you still enjoy that type of thing, but it was like God showed you and taught you a very valuable lesson in terms of saying, "When you are working towards something for me, remember that

sometimes I will slow you down. I will lead you beside green pastures and still waters and restore your soul."

Talk about why that synergy, it's a both-and, not an either-or, is so important for us, as Christians, to understand.

Sara Hagerty: I think it ultimately connects us to a deeper conversation with God. As we grow and mature, we start to realize parts of ourselves that maybe we haven't brought into the light, into God's light, for his exposure, for him to bring clarity. And there are times when I have felt in my life that the Lord has said, "Push hard through this hard." And there's other times where I have felt the Lord saying to me, "It's time to rest." But I think in order to engage with the layers of God, it actually requires us to get quiet, to have moments in our day, practical moments in our day, moments in our week, where we're sitting before him and saying, 'This push that I feel that I have to overcome this ... Is this from you, God? Or is this because I'm actually very afraid of what will happen if I don't?'"

I think, as a mom with seven kids, we have a lot of different personalities.

Roger Marsh: That's for sure.

Sara Hagerty: And there are times with a child where I will feel this urge like I've got to work through this with this child. I have to get them from A to B. And when I get quiet, some of that ... What's revealed underneath that is I'm afraid of what will happen if they don't get to where I think they need to be. It actually isn't this God-given drive that I want them to grow in character, but underneath it all, it's actually a fear that I'm afraid that God won't catch me or them if they fall.

Roger Marsh: If you keep moving, if you keep on pushing toward these things, then the body in motion stays in motion, and that way you won't fall, or you're not as likely to fall. I can understand it's a human tendency, and living in the go-go-go society that we live in, I mean, let's face it. I mean, you have seven kids, and schedules are crazy. You and your husband are trying to keep your marriage together. Something you write about in the book, *The Gift of Limitations*, is something you call a productivity fast.

Talk about that because it seems so counterintuitive, but I love the word picture you paint there.

Sara Hagerty: Well, I just have found that I like myself better when I'm productive, but I transfer that to God. I start to think, well, if I like myself better, surely God likes me better. And so, what I write about in *The Gift of Limitations* is for a period of time I started to think, if I'm not as productive, how does God see me? Really, is God actually waiting on my productivity to applaud productivity, even advancements in the kingdom of God? Or how does he see a person at rest?

And so, I decided to just give myself a little test for a short period of time. A couple of months. I vastly limited my productivity in the most productive part of my day. As a mom of young kids, at that point, my most productive part of my day was the afternoon when they were napping or in rest time. And I would just crank it out. All the stuff I needed to do around my house. All the stuff I felt like I needed to do as a writer. And so, I just limited myself. I chose to limit myself. And I said I'm going to just do one or two things, but during this most productive time of my day, I'm going to get those one or two things done, and then I'm going to take a walk in the woods, or I'm going to read poetry, or I'm going to read a novel, or I'm going to read scripture. Things that actually I can't check a box and say, "Look what I did," and I want to experience what it feels like to be unproductive.

And the first thing I noticed is that I like myself better when I'm productive. And I noticed that I feel a little squirrely when I'm not productive, which then led me to believe I think a lot of my productivity is actually really driven by a desire to feel better than it is driven by a desire to really honor God.

Roger Marsh:

Boy, that's a powerful statement, especially when you think of all the attractive distractions there are in the culture that give us the sense that we accomplish something. There's someone listening to our conversation right now, Sara, and they're saying, "That's easy for you. I'm glad you figured it out. Congratulations, but I still have this obstacle."

Talk to that person who is wanting to overcome that obstacle, but they just don't know what is God doing with this obstacle in their life. How do you identify whether it's positive or negative, if you could address that?

Sara Hagerty:

Well, I would say I am that person. Here, I wrote this book called *The Gift of Limitations*, and I'm living that message again and again. For me, I feel like I think I'm going to live this until I die.

I think one of the most significant things is actually naming the limitation and naming it as such because a lot of times we react to it ... To use a quote from Don Quixote, "We tilt at windmills." We react to these limitations without actually ever naming them. And so, we don't even know what to talk to God about.

To that person who's going, "I really am fighting for this relationship. I need this to be at a certain place," or, "I am seeing my bank account, and it's not where I want it to be, and it's leaving me very squirrely," ... To that person, I would say I think the first most significant thing is actually naming your limit because that's what you can talk to God about.

And the second is carving out space to begin to bring those limitations to God and actually grieve them, which so many of us don't get to grieving because we're working so hard to overcome, but there's a power in grief. And we know

this. We know that God is near to the brokenhearted, and we think that's, well, he's near to me when my dad died, but is he near to me as a mom of seven when I can't make my ... I write about this in *The Gift of Limitations*. When I can't make my mom's 70th birthday because I'm pregnant, and I have a broken ankle, and I can't fly across the country for it. Is that something to keep trying to fight and press through? Or can I sit in grief and go, "God, the story you've given me has kept me from doing things I really want to do,"?

Roger Marsh: I mean, think about Paul and the thorn in the flesh in second Corinthians where he's saying, "I kept going to the Lord and asking him to remove it." And every time, God kept saying, "My grace is sufficient for you," which the implication is that limitation isn't going away anytime soon.

And I think that maybe the attitude that we, as Christians, sometimes have is a limitation is a liability that we need to get rid of because we can never serve God unless we're fully, fully, fully. You have something you write about in *The Gift of Limitations* called the come, die, grieve, and live cycle, and you mentioned grief there. Help us understand what that cycle looks like.

Sara Hagerty: Well, I think the coming is actually naming what's hard. And I imagine there are listeners right now who have just ... If you're like me, you felt deeply validated in seeking to overcome that limitation because, aren't we overcomers, right? The first thing might be just pausing for a second and going, "This thing that is not moving in my life ... Could it be that God is not intending for it to move right now?" And so, naming that and naming how you feel about it. And I just want to give permission to people. If you are angry, frustrated, feeling disillusioned, it's okay. The psalmists gave us lanes for these kinds of emotions. And so, naming what it is, bringing these feelings to God, letting the dream die a little bit ... I mean, we don't hear that a lot in Christian circles, but some of us are really being invited into letting our dreams die because, in that death, we actually get to find God.

Roger Marsh: I think sometimes we talk about limitations we have or maybe a season of grief. There's this thought that, God, I need a minute so I can just go grieve this, and I'll get back with you as soon as I've grieved it a little bit. Instead of saying, "Hey, I need to just sit in your lap, Jesus, and grieve and to name and to say, 'Boy, this really stinks.'"

And I think, as a parent ... And you've had a chance to innate with your seven kids. I'm sure on many occasions you've had a chance to ... The child comes running up with a scraped knee or some kind of boo-boo or whatever, and what do we do? We just wrap our arms around them and say, "I know. I know. It's okay." We can identify what that hurt is, and then we can move forward.

And one of the things you write about in *The Gift of Limitations* is dealing with the fact that when you come to these things ... I used to work for a guy, an old radio boss, years ago who said his favorite verse in Scripture was, "It came to pass," and that was because it didn't come to stay. And I think when it comes to

these types of situations ... I know he was having a little bit of fun with scripture, but at the same time, we have to understand that ... Think of Ecclesiastes 3:1. There is a time for everything. There's a season for every activity under heaven.

How do you then encourage us to take *The Gift of Limitations* and say, "I want to apply these principles to that situation," where it doesn't really seem like there's sort of hope for something pretty major in the...

Sara Hagerty: Well, I'll tell you, I mean, how I did. Part of the start of this story was we, my husband and I, walked through 13 years of infertility.

Roger Marsh: Oh, my goodness.

Sara Hagerty: And so, I knew very intimately what it felt like to ask God for something very good that he has intended for his people and him not open that door. And yet I look back now, and I go, wow, that was the shaping of me. The woman I am today is because of that long, extended period in the waiting room. And yet I look back, and it's obviously easier to say after the fact, but I will say, even in real time, I felt like I first encountered the face of God, the lines on his face, his tenderness, the way he comes near to our pain when I was waiting and there were no answers.

And we see it all over Scripture. Now, we don't want that story for our lives, but I think if we would let ourselves believe that there is the goodness of God in the land of the living in those moments, we might open ourselves up to going, "This isn't just about when I'm done with this thing that's really hard."

Roger Marsh: It's for right now. It's what you are going through. I was just humming in my mind as you were sharing that story and imagining what it was like for those 13 years for you and Nate. Michael Peterson has a song called "The Silence of God" that he wrote. He went to a men's retreat that was supposed to be at this old monastery in Kentucky, and it wound up getting canceled, and he didn't get the note. He went out there, and no one else was there. And so, the caretaker said, "Well, you could stay here if you want to, but, I mean, no one's coming here."

And so, he spent the weekend there just kind of in solitude and silence, and he said, "I just wandered around. There was a statue of Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane," and thinking about the fact that he's weeping and he's alone, and the disciples were all asleep. And I kept thinking about ... He called the holy lonesome echo of the silence of God when you're crying out and just saying, "Lord, where are you? Where are you?"

And for 13 years, you guys walked that. Now, I'm going to ask maybe a somewhat tongue-in-cheek question. Now that you have seven children, seven arrows in the quiver, do you ever look back on those years and say, "Wow, wasn't that a great season?"

Sara Hagerty: I mean, that's the irony. And I do write about this in *The Gift of Limitations*. The irony is I wanted a different life during those years. And if I'm really honest, there's been times where I'm finding socks in the couch pillow, and there's boots left in the woods, and some kid's calling me for the fourth time because they left their water bottle somewhere else. And I'm going, "This is really hard. When will we get to breathe?" And it's that.

Actually, that was the catalyst for writing the book. That I started to realize, in every season of my life, I have been limited from what I want. Could there be a theme that God puts a fence line around our lives and says, "That grass underneath your feet and the willow tree within your reach and the birds that you can hear are to be had for beauty. And you've got your eyes over the fence line, but there's a life right underneath your feet that I have positioned for you,"? And that was when I had no kids, and that was when I'm up to my eyeballs in kids crying to my husband at night going, "How did we get here?"

Roger Marsh: And he said, "Well, God answered your prayer, and He kept answering."

Sara Hagerty: Absolutely. Right?

Roger Marsh: That was one prayer, Lord. That wasn't seven times, but good for you guys and your patience and your perseverance. The book is called *The Gift of Limitations*. And as we bring our time to a close, people are saying, "Great. This has worked for you, and you're writing about it, having walked through it and continuing to walk through it now," but there's someone listening right now who says, "I want to identify what's going on here," but I know my personality. If I start naming all of my limitations, I'll lose my hope for the future. And then there definitely is a balance.

Talk about how you balance and how you encourage other people to say, "Yes, you do have to go through the come, die, grieve, live cycle, but you also have to keep an eye on what God has in store for you because this life is all temporal, but we are eternally married to Christ through the body of Christ."

Sara Hagerty: Absolutely. I'll say to the person who's afraid to go down that path because you just don't want to lose your hope ... I would say maybe there is actually a loss of hope that you haven't named yet that's coming up in your cynicism or your frustration or your ... There's something really powerful about productive naming and grieving, meaning I'm going to stay in this to see what God has for me.

I want to encourage that person that there's actually a ton of hope on the other side of naming your limitations because it's not just name and sit and become Eeyore. It's actually, if I can name this and invite God into this, maybe this fence line that I've been staring at for a decade and begging God to move it ... Maybe it's going to feel different, and maybe all of a sudden it's going to look ... Instead of the thing that's keeping me from what's on the other side, it's actually going

to look like the thing that's keeping my eyes fixed on the life that God has given me right now that's more rich than I ever realized it was.

Roger Marsh: Well, I really resonate with Eeyore. Let's not forget, though, that even though Eeyore was kind of dour and whatever, he always got invited to hang out with the rest of the guys in The Hundred Acre Wood.

Sara Hagerty: That's right.

Roger Marsh: Even if you've got that kind of semi-pessimistic ... I like to say realistic attitude. This is a great resource to help you learn how to balance between the hope that you want to have and maintain in your heart and the limitations that God is using to make you the man or woman that he's called you to be. The Gift of Limitations by Sara Hagerty is available wherever Christian books are sold. And how do we find you online? Where are you available on the socials?

Sara Hagerty: I'm on Instagram at @SaraHagertyWrites. I'm on Substack at SOAR by Sara Hagerty. I also am at sarahagerty.net.

Roger Marsh: All right, Sara Hagerty. Thank you so much for *The Gift of Limitations* and for being with us today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Sara Hagerty: Thanks so much, Roger.

Roger Marsh: This certainly was a delightful conversation, even though the topic of the conversation isn't always easy for us, as Christians, to deal with, and that is *The Gift of Limitations*. Why is it that it seems we live in a culture that says, "Hey, if you're getting everything right and living a good, godly life, you should be able to have whatever you want,"? And yet, as we read Scripture and as we walk with the Lord and the Holy Spirit continues to comfort and counsel us, we do realize that limitations can be a gift at times. And Sara Hagerty writes about that in her brand-new book called *The Gift of Limitations: Finding Beauty in Your Boundaries*. We've got a link for the book up at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

And by the way, if you know someone who's struggling with this issue right now, I highly recommend that you share a copy of this program with them. And to do so, all you have to do is hit the link on our website or use the JDFI app, and you can share the conversation I just had with author Sara Hagerty talking about *The Gift of Limitations* and finding beauty in your boundaries.

Now, it seems hard to believe that we're nearing the end of 2024. And as we near the end of our calendar year, I want to thank you for listening to the Family Talk broadcast all throughout the year, whether you listen on terrestrial radio or online or through the app. We are able to produce these programs to broadcast to you each and every day because of your prayers and your faithful financial support. If you're supporting us already, thank you so much for that ongoing month-to-month giving. And if you've yet to make a contribution this year,

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Or write to us at P.O. Box 39000 Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip code: 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh. For Dr. James Dobson and all of us here at the JDFI, thanks so much for listening. 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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