



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Stages of A Woman – Part 1

Guest(s): Jean Lush

Air Date: July 8, 2025

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

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. You know, many women approaching their 40s begin experiencing unexpected changes, a lack of energy perhaps. Maybe your feelings are a bit off or you may be experiencing what feels like a general sense of unrest. If that sounds familiar, well today's Family Talk broadcast will offer both understanding as well as hope. Our guest today here on the program is the late Jean Lush, a pioneering counselor who spent over 30 years helping women navigate life's challenging seasons. Jean was actually the first woman certified as a marriage counselor in the state of Washington, and her insights into the emotional phases of womanhood have helped countless families. On today's Family Talk broadcast, you'll hear Jean's conversation with Dr. Dobson about what she calls "the malaise of the early 40s" and why understanding this phrase can bring such relief. So here now is Dr. James Dobson to introduce his guest Jean Lush on today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Tell me what a woman goes through in these menopausal years, and I would like you to deal with the emotional and psychological aspects of menopause with the thousands of women that you've counseled with.

Jean Lush: You know, it's with a real purpose that I've labeled the malaise of the early 40s. That word's a good word, I think. And I think now quite close after all the activity and the insurgent years of the 30s, we come to the malaise of the early 40s. Now this is what I-

Dr. James Dobson: Define the word malaise. A general decline-

Jean Lush: A blah. A blahness over everything. It's like a falling away somewhat. It's not a stopping; it's like the doldrums you might speak of in the sky. It's the beginning of the clouds, but yet nothing is yet happening. And I think that's a good word to use for the emotional feeling of many women in the early 40s.

First of all, sometimes quite suddenly now, they will enter into this strange phase, which shall I read out just a list of symptoms here that I have observed?

Dr. James Dobson: Why don't you do it?

Jean Lush: Yes, I think it'll save time. The menstrual cycle may be regular enough; there's not much observable changes yet. A hormone check may not reveal any estrogen changes either at this point, but the psychological and emotional picture is again quite different. Now we're going to get touchiness to the point of being almost slightly paranoid, somewhat morbid, somewhat sad, but they are overly reactive now to little things. It almost seems like their lives were big in their 30s and so they went through a lot of things without overreacting. This is a slightly over-reactive phase perhaps. Increased introspection, which I'm going to deal with here in a few minutes. It would be mild depression more than the deeper depression you find later, but there is a withdrawal from activities. Many husbands have reported they can't understand the loss of interest their wives may have say in cooking or the house, where they may have a real joy in their house now seems so much endless, unrewarded sort of labor right now.

Jean Lush: I'd say a loss of interest often in highly prized areas seems to happen. Feeling foreboding feelings. What is very noticeable I think is indecision at this point now. It's difficult to make decisions. There's definitely an increase in dependency needs now. This is where I think a woman pulls more from her husband, pulls more nurturing and support from her husband perhaps. There now is a tremendous pressure on the marriage to meet new and increasing romantic fantasies I've got down here, just at a time when a man may be moving toward a crisis of his own.

Dr. James Dobson: In other words, he's moving away from her at a time when she's moving toward him.

Jean Lush: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And that's built for trouble.

Jean Lush: Yes. Now I have to admit, this is something I have observed, I can't fall back on any research to tell you that, but I've observed this quite a lot at this point, and especially in the way the man describes it to me because he'll say, "I can't meet all her needs," and sometimes he adds, "I don't really want to," at this point.

I've used the word here where she was highly instrumental, now she changes more to an emotional kind of person; low in creativity perhaps, low in autonomy. Autonomy I mean by a self-starter kind of thing. I find here all of a sudden that she's sort of low in this particular quality really at this point.

Dr. James Dobson: Is there a loss of energy at this stage?

Jean Lush: Definitely. Because loss of energy it seems like... By the way, many women are even staying in bed at this point and their husbands are complaining that they don't even have the energy often to get out of bed even really at this time.

Dr. James Dobson: Now let's clarify, we're not talking about menopause.

Jean Lush: No we're not talking about menopause.

Dr. James Dobson: We're talking about premenopausal situation.

Jean Lush: We really are talking about a premenopausal situation. Now, one of the very important things now I want to talk about is a strange what I call recapitulation at this time, and this is one of the most serious things that I run into. There is a sudden tendency now to go back over one's life and mulling over it. It's like a dog with a bone; you don't let go. And there's a lot of this if only I had known what I know now I wouldn't have gone this way or that way, a feeling of being a victim of something, like there's a sudden... one of my friends explained to me how she was really trapped into suddenly being angry with her parents at this time, and she'd never been angry with her parents before, until she found it was getting into quite a trap.

So we look back and find ourselves not only a victim of what other people did to us, but hating ourselves for the kinds of decisions that we made, or often decisions that we didn't make too. We say, "If only I really knew what I know now, my life would've been different," and yet they don't seem to realize there's no way of knowing then what they know now. This is just living brings us more know-how. By the way, this can be an increasing problem throughout the years of a woman's life, because a woman over the years if she doesn't watch it, gets stuck with this kind of thing, that I am a failure because of, and sort of a self-blaming introspection kind of thing.

And by the way, this will often appear at certain stages. I notice it in connection with serious operations that interfere with the reproductive cycle you might find, sort of a...

Dr. James Dobson: A hysterectomy or an oophorectomy.

Jean Lush: Yes, these kinds of things I think seems to trigger it off quite a bit. Now we mentioned throughout the 30s how a woman can go along nicely and defend off things that are going on with great positiveness. Oh this will be all right, this is only a stage. I know this will go away if I keep positively thinking about this thing, I won't let this thing get me down, this kind of thing. But I find now in the 40s, it's very possible that slight physiological changes, it means there's a loss of energy. We don't have the psychic energy now to keep defended off the reality. Reality has come home to roost is what I think I'm getting at now often in the early 40s, really getting one down. And there are feelings of low self-worth is often noticeable. You notice how often that comes up from the calls we've been getting.

Dr. James Dobson: That's the primary psychological characteristic.

Jean Lush: It probably is about this time.

Dr. James Dobson: And Jean, the dynamite, the incredibly explosive aspect of this is a woman is starting to go through this at the time that the husband may be experiencing his midlife crisis, or the start of it, but also at a time when their kids are going through adolescence, which can be incredibly stressful on the parents. So you've got a triple threat that occurs there in the 40s. I think it's important for us to mention too that it varies in age, doesn't it?

Jean Lush: Very much.

Dr. James Dobson: For some it comes in the 30s and some late 40s.

Jean Lush: Oh yes. I hate to use an age, it's just that I've seen so many. You see what I mean? Around this age. I'm only using that. Now another thing, of course, a lot of these people that I'm talking about married fairly early. Remember now, when we first came to this country in '52 how many kids in senior year were sort of engaged? It was fashionable when we came here for there to be very early marriage. And so of course we're talking now about people who will be married quite early too. So possibly the kids, some of the kids are a little bit more than teenagers at this time. So of course, some of the kids are leaving home and there's a lot of other changes going on. But I do not feel that the empty nest syndrome as it were is the answer here.

Dr. James Dobson: No, that can't account for it.

Jean Lush: I mean that's trite compared to the deep feelings now of miserableness that I think often settle on a woman in these years. I finally have labeled this simply the malaise of a premenopausal kind of thing. I suspect it's more physiological in a sense. The base of this emotional letdown I suspect being physiologic. I don't know that yet, but there's some... perhaps we're going to find out.

Dr. James Dobson: Well considering what is likely to follow, the full blown menopausal experience, at least for the women who really struggle with menopause. It seems reasonable that since that is known to be related to a hormone imbalance, that this is the early stage of that.

Jean Lush: And I think too, one aspect we mustn't forget of this what I call recapitulatory phase is realizing all of a sudden that the expectations of the 30s are never going to be met. Like in the 30s, as I said, our positiveness is often very high and we can often say, "He will change, they will change, this will change. I will yet be fulfilled. If I'm a good Christian woman and I have really followed along through everything I've ever been taught, therefore I shall reap the happiness that I really deserve."

And so now there's an awful feeling or reality that perhaps things will never change and that things aren't going to be the way we want them, and I think

that the letdown is partly the awful fact that there isn't going to be a great thing about to happen because suddenly we're more likely to see that our husbands are really not going to be the romantic dream that we've perhaps expected them to be all these years. That dear John is as he is, you see. He isn't going to change. Because I feel the romantic fantasies about this is very strong in women. It's a problem.

Dr. James Dobson: Jean, I think we ought to hasten to address the woman who's listening to us right now who's in her 20s or early 30s who is getting fearful as we talk. And she says, "My goodness, that's ahead for me and I thought everything was going so well. Am I really going to go into that tailspin?" Can you help her see this as a phase, as something that she will also conquer and live through, and that life is better on the other side of?

Jean Lush: Well, I think we're talking remember now to a particular age group too. And I think the new young people coming up now, remember, haven't married so young. Now there's a big difference I think in the root coming up. They've done their thing a lot. They've had a chance, they're marrying later, perhaps children are coming a little later. And I think we might find some great differences here ahead to this very age group you're talking about, because I feel that a lot of them were in to marriage very early and perhaps that's got something to do with the fact that they didn't allow themselves many choices at all, and they got rather early trapped, you know what I mean?

Dr. James Dobson: The ones you've dealt with to this time.

Jean Lush: At this time. I'm talking particularly to them because the new group coming up are going to have an entirely different new set of things because I think they've had a different young life.

Dr. James Dobson: But if it's hormonal, Jean. I mean, if it's inside, if it's built into the genes, if it's genetic in nature.

Jean Lush: Right. So some of this, some of this we're talking about isn't probably going to change, but I do think we're going to know a lot more about the physiology. Research is going to bring us a lot more to light yet. See, I don't think we know a great deal at this point about all the treatment we're going to find out about yet. And so I think we're going to find that out. And I think there's a lot of things about say diet, nutrition, a lot more things we have to find out yet.

Dr. James Dobson: Exercise.

Jean Lush: Exercise and so-

Dr. James Dobson: And wouldn't you say before we go any further what I know you believe? That the postmenopausal years can be the most rewarding, fulfilling, and energetic years of life.

Jean Lush: Oh yes. I think we can look back at all history and say that, because it's like when the body is finished with the reproductive cycle, it has a great deal more energy to give to other things. And the woman is left with new energies for learning, greater socialization, and she can undertake far greater things. I think that the postmenopausal years are the best years of our life. I certainly have found them to be so in my own life. And I think anybody who dares to believe that and go ahead and start new things, it's a large life ahead of us.

Dr. James Dobson: All right so what we're trying to describe today is if you see life as a river and we're now describing a bunch of boats going down the river and in those boats are people who are at an earlier age. They're in their 20s and 30s. What we're saying is now don't get alarmed and don't get upset, but there are some rapids ahead and your boats are going to bounce around a little bit, but boy, you can't believe the beauty that's on the other side of it.

Jean Lush: Oh my, do I... I greatly believe that. We are talking about perhaps a malaise period that I think we can't ignore, and maybe it is going to be rough for some, not for everybody, but it's going to be rough for some. And by recognizing it, remember, we can deal with it so much better. Look, if people don't recognize this, what I've just talked about, they're going to feel like they're going crazy perhaps. They're going to feel bad.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. You add the dimension of fear then, fear of the unknown.

Jean Lush: But you see, remember, knowledge in a sense brings awareness and remedies. But I think that half of all this is simply recognizing and accepting these things because then I don't think that we are so fearful about things. In fact, it's cut right down to size I think when we are aware. Look, in acceptance lieth peace. You know what I mean? So I think it's better to know fully these things and deal with them on an acceptance level. Perhaps we can't change them all, but my word, if you're a woman and suddenly get some knowledge about your body, you're going to feel very differently about it.

Dr. James Dobson: Knowing what you know about the premenopausal era, this malaise that you're talking about in the late 30s, early 40s, what if you were there right now what would you do? What if you didn't feel like getting up in the morning?

Jean Lush: Now, unfortunately here comes my old British stoicism, I'm afraid I'd do it.

Dr. James Dobson: You'd get up.

Jean Lush: Yes, I'd get up and I think I'm a very duty sort of a person. I would tend to make myself do things a good deal. I would just go ahead. I feel that I would do what I ought to do very much. Now another thing I will say here, in my own life, and really, I have faced these problems, I've had the most horrible premenstrual tensions possible. And again went down in a horrible depression, menopause. But in my own life, I have really experienced the healing and deliverance of the

Lord. And I can't expect everybody perhaps to experience that, but I have. And when I saw that God didn't deliver Paul from that thorn and the Lord said to him, "Hey fella, you live with that and I'm going to be your strength. There's enough grace in here for you," that had a lot of meaning to me.

So I do tend to... I expect the Lord for special grace at times when I'm facing things. That has become so habitual to me that I know the outer part of me wears out, but the inner man can be renewed by God day by day. I know what that means and so this is the way I've always lived and carried on just the same. And every woman can just go to the Lord, because I'm not sure that we're going to be able to remove all our physiological imbalance necessarily. But God's greater than that.

Dr. James Dobson: Jean, when I first met you, I was up in the Seattle area and I was invited to be a guest on Beverly Baker's radio program. You'd probably recognize her name instantly.

Jean Lush: Oh, she's a great friend of mine.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh yes, and Beverly is a great interviewer. And while I was there, I said, "Have you had anybody else on your program that's been good and interesting who is known in their field?" And she said, "I got a couple of tapes I want you to listen to." And she gave me two tapes of your previous visit to her studio dealing with this subject of menopause, and it was very exciting to me find somebody else who had observed the same things I had and had come to some of the same conclusions, plus a few from your readings that I picked up some information that was valuable to me on those tapes, and from that has come our friendship. So you're dealing with this thing we're talking about here today.

Jean Lush: Now this thing we're talking about today is the most unknown part of the menopause. I think we have to say now that when women feel this and run to their doctors, and now comes the hard part, the doctors say, "There is nothing wrong with you." And they're likely to dish out perhaps tranquilizers, you know what I mean?

Dr. James Dobson: Elavil.

Jean Lush: Antidepressants and these things. And perhaps the doctors are not very sympathetic because they can't find anything to deal with. And I believe, this is the hard part, later on in what I call the mid cycle of menopause, it's recognized easily enough because we have a lot of the straight, shall we say, somatic symptoms more. And so then they get treatment. But if they go now, doctors are not going to want to treat them because it's pretty... Doctors may think, "Oh I can't start the estrogen replacement treatment at this time."

Dr. James Dobson: They not only don't want to treat it, and I'm not being unkind in the medical profession because I might feel the same way, but they don't want those

women in their offices because they don't know what to do with them and they're back and they're back and they're back again and they're crying and they're dissatisfied and they're depressed and yet the physician can't find anything wrong with them and doesn't know what to do with them.

Jean Lush: They really don't.

Dr. James Dobson: It's a frustration for everybody.

Jean Lush: It is. This is the most difficult part of it all, I think. But I feel now we should hit it straight on and say, This can be for some women." But I'm hoping now of course that perhaps more physicians will be able to recognize it and reassure women that for some, this early phase, they're not crazy to feel this and it's perfectly okay suddenly to feel a bit blah.

Dr. James Dobson: And you have a physician friend that you've worked with for 25 years.

Jean Lush: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: What does he do for a person-

Jean Lush: He knows how to treat this.

Dr. James Dobson: How does he treat it?

Jean Lush: He has now got some different hormonal treatments that he treats us with because... I don't dare go into that at this time, but he's treating it. Several of them are doing it up there and it's very successful. And by the way, they immediately are able to restore a woman to what they say the level of the 30s, the better self-esteem era. They are treating it. It can be treated medically and perhaps it may be difficult all over the country, but I know in our area we can get this area treated.

But there's still one thing I'd like to say more on a positive side. Of course, this is a phase we remember now, when the youngsters now are living their own lives probably, because we said a lot of this group now, remember were married fairly early. They seemed to have their children early. This was the days we're talking about before birth control was sort of in, remember. So the children tended to come early. Now because of that, a lot of these women in their early 40s may in a sense have nobody anymore that they have to wait on shall we say in the homes. A lot of the children may be somewhat independent now.

Now, I think it's awfully important to direct these women out of their own goals, and by the way, in my groups that I took, we were heavy on this. I kept hammering away that every woman had to find her God-given mission in this life. I think I'm quoting Abraham Maslow I think was the man who says that. And whether or not he was a Christian I don't know, but that's what he said. And he

went on to say something about, "And therein lies their identity." Now comes the time that I feel we should go back and ask ourselves, what did I want to do perhaps? Now I've done a good job of all these roles I played these years. Now what is there for me? And I think this is often important. So I hammer at this in all the cases I see.

Dr. James Dobson: Instead of lamenting the past and what wasn't and what should have been and what could have been, it is saying now that my home responsibilities are changing and lessening, what new thing can I do with my life?

Jean Lush: And that's a hard one. Now sometimes women say, "Well I don't really think there's anything I want to do," but I don't let them get away with that at all. Sometimes we send them to exploring classes run by our local community colleges, which are very good, and which they are now exploring all the things that one could do and then showing women how to go about making kind of a fresh start from the position that they are in. And so this is the time now I feel to be facing up to one's life ahead and not just staying where they were. It's a time for some new beginnings. Because, there's no question about it, as we go through this phase... I think what we call a menopause is a little door, the jolly little door narrows down so we stoop to go through it as it were. We feel cramped up. And all of a sudden, we step out on the other side and it's a great big well-lighted palace if you like. And that's like our new life.

Dr. James Dobson: Jean, our time's gone and I just have to stop you. So again, next time we'll talk about that new life and a little bit more about the doorway. Will you join us again?

Jean Lush: I'd love to.

Roger Marsh: Well I hope you've been encouraged today by part one of Dr. James Dobson's classic conversation with the late Jean Lush here on Family Talk. Jean was fiercely devoted to ministering to women, and it was such an honor to have her as our guest on the program. Now if you missed any portion of today's broadcast, or if you'd like to share it with someone who needs encouragement, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk, and there you'll find the complete program along with information about Jean's landmark book called *Emotional Phases of a Woman's Life*. Again, that's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we're committed to equipping families with biblical truth for every season. And your gift today enables us to continue broadcasting hope and practical wisdom to millions of listeners. You can make a secure donation online at drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org. or call us. Our constituent care team is waiting to receive your call when you dial 877-732-6825. That's 877-732 -6825.

I'm Roger Marsh inviting you to join us again next time as Dr. James Dobson continues his conversation with Jean Lush on the important issue of navigating life's transitions with grace. That's coming up right here on the next 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.

Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone, do you need help dealing with the everyday tasks of raising a family? I'm James Dobson here and if you do, I hope you'll tune in to our next edition of Family Talk. Our main purpose in this ministry is to put tools into your hands that will strengthen your marriage and help you raise your kids. Hope to see you right here next time for another edition of Family Talk.