



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Freedom to Stand – Part 2

Guest(s): Wes Modder

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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. I'm Roger Marsh. On today's program, we're going to hear the conclusion of a conversation Dr. Dobson had with the late Dr. Wes Modder and Dr. Modder's story of being accused of engaging in, quote, unquote, "discrimination of sexual orientation and different standards of respect." That took place back in 2014, charges stemming from his giving biblically-based counsel to a subordinate who is practicing homosexuality. The case drew national attention and, ultimately, led to Dr. Modder's exoneration. For nearly two decades, Dr. Wes Modder served our nation with honor and distinction, first, as a member of the United States Marine Corps, and then as a commissioned chaplain in the U.S. Navy. Dr. Modder serves as an exemplary example of how to stand your ground when your religious liberties are under attack. Now let's join Dr. James Dobson and Dr. Wes Modder right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Dr. Modder, what is it like to give your life to something you believe in? You believe in your country and you believe in the defense of your country. You gave 19 years in dangerous situations with the SEALs and with Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm. You poured your life into this, to all of a sudden have your leadership questioned, your loyalty, you mentioned, and to question your values even to imply that you lost touch here. What'd that do to you? What'd that do to your heart?

Wes Modder: Oh, it was crushing. I could hardly believe the charges and so I want to thank the local church. The local church stepped in and provided healing and prayer. All these people came toward me like, "Man, you're standing up-

Dr. James Dobson: There you are, and brought a team around you.

Wes Modder: They brought a team. At one point, there was 42 lawyers with two law firms and 55 congressmen and...

Dr. James Dobson: Now wait, I want you to elaborate on that. 55 congressmen, what'd they do?

Wes Modder: They signed a petition, and there's a whole strategy when you're attacked and there's a strategy to protect you. This is a religious liberty battle. This is why we're here as America. Our First Amendment, you have the freedom to believe or not believe, but you don't have the freedom to be oppressive and to discriminate against people who may have a different faith or a Judeo-Christian belief. I'm like, "Why is this happening to me?"

Dr. James Dobson: They were really wanting you to deny your relationship with Christ, what you read in the Scripture and what He had been to you. You are not just a chaplain there because Wes Modder wanted this as a career. You went there to convey truth, biblical truth as you knew it and understand it, and they were asking you to deny all that.

Wes Modder: They were, and any commander you ask in the military would want their chaplain to do that. But what happens is you're more concerned about a fitness report or how someone might perceive you or your reputation, but in actuality, there's no guarantee you will retire. So I'm humbled that the Lord would use me. It's like, "Nope, marriage is a man and a woman and if you want to practice that in the military, if you want to have a man and a man and a woman and a woman, don't ask me in private counseling sessions to validate that," because that's what the gay community was looking for. I love the Navy. I've forgiven my commander, and I've forgiven the chaplain who brought all these charges and worked behind the scenes.

I forgive the Lieutenant J.G. who brought these charges. But back to your question, doctor, I am better for it. It was a crucible. It was like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, reality is, I'm not going to bow down. If you create the idol and you write it on policy at their strategic command and moves down to the operational command and down to the tactical command, then the chaplains are down there at the tactical level, and they want to follow these orders. I will deploy. I will run. I will cut my hair short. I will do everything the military asks of me, and I did faithfully, but my ordination and my unalienable rights are not something for debate. If policy goes against Scripture, it is my duty and my function to say, "Excuse me, that is wrong."

Dr. James Dobson: I say to that, praise the Lord. We aired a program that was based on my book, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. I wrote it some years ago, and the essence of it is that there are times when all of us as Christians run into things we can't understand from a spiritual point of view. You can search the Bible back and forth like Job did. He didn't have a Bible, but he was looking for answers. The Lord said, "Who are you to ask?" Now, there'll be times when you can't make the pieces fit. You can trust the Lord when you can't track Him, but there are times when He becomes obscure to us. I have no idea why. I just know that happens in the Christian life where you would love to sit down with Him and say, "Lord, explain this to me. Why did I lose a child? Or why did the military treat me like this?" I've had a few bumps in my road too, and so we were talking about that. I say all that to bring you to that part of your experience. You hit the betrayal barrier, didn't you?

Wes Modder: I did.

Dr. James Dobson: There was a time when you would've loved to have had a little conversation with the Lord to say, "I did the best I could. I've tried to serve You. I've served You with a willing heart for all these years. I followed the call, and I've been faithfully teaching the Word to both my students and to those that came to me for counsel as a chaplain and it's fallen apart. I don't even know where I'm going. I've been selected here for really some very hurtful experiences. Explain this to me. I will be glad to carry the burden. Explain it to me," but He usually doesn't. There was a time when you were asking for answers and struggling to get them, weren't there?

Wes Modder: There were many times, but specifically, December of 2014, when all the charges came from my employer.

Dr. James Dobson: Remind us of what they were. What did they accuse you of doing?

Wes Modder: The Navy, after 19 years of faithful and honorable service decided to charge me with the inability to function in a diverse pluralistic environment. There's four core capabilities of the Navy Chaplain: to care, provide, facilitate and advise. The care piece was being redefined.

Dr. James Dobson: That's the one that hurt the most, wasn't it?

Wes Modder: It is because that's what we do. If I don't know how to care for people, I shouldn't have a cross on my collar. So caring, we want to redefine marriage. We want to self-identify. When you peel this onion all the way back, it's the resistance of who Jesus said He was. It's not really about me, but boy, it sure felt personal. It was very painful because you expect a loyal return. I've given You faithful years of service. I have a record. You can read it online if you want, and now what? See what God has is an eternal perspective that we don't have, and it's hard for Him.

Dr. James Dobson: It's hard to believe, but He wanted you to go through this.

Wes Modder: That's right. It's not really about my promotion. It's not really about the Navy attacking Chaplain Modder because I'm intolerant. It's really about God establishing His kingdom. It's really about our culture now is in a collision course with the God of the universe, that He is God and we are not. So when we go through this painful ordeal, as I shared this morning with your staff in devotions on Psalms 25 and 27, it was like drinking fresh, clear spring water in the midst of the storm. I would just cry through those.

I'm like, "God, this is painful. Is this what You want from me? Have I made a difference? Am I encouraging others? Do I just walk away? I don't want to descend from my endorsing agent. I don't want to descend from my commander. I want to please my commander. I want to do good for my

commander. I want to be a force multiplier. I want to be a chaplain that all people have access to and to encourage them and pray for them on their journey of faith." That's what I do. I'm the subject matter expert. They call us a SME. That's my function as a chaplain. I was brought in by Chaplain Barry Black. He was the one who hired me.

Dr. James Dobson: Really?

Wes Modder: We were sitting there at Navy Annex, and he looked at me, and I looked at him and he said, quote, "It is apparent to me, you obviously have a divine relationship with the Divine, and we're so honored to have you on board," and my career in the Navy has been exceptional. From the Marines, the 11th MEU, to the Bunker Hill, to the Navy Nuclear Power Training Command, Naval Base San Diego, Helicopter Sea Combat Wing Pacific Fleet, I have had an exceptionally wonderful career. I have been able to lead many people to Christ who were hungry searching for God. They come in the military and they had this divine moment where they're sitting in front of a chaplain and they're looking for truth and they're looking for hope, and I was able to be that conduit.

Dr. James Dobson: You're about to be turned out and nowhere to go.

Wes Modder: That's right, and I'm like, "What's happening?" So sometimes faith is a moment-by-moment thing-

Dr. James Dobson: It sure is.

Wes Modder: ... because we are not designed to have all the answers.

Dr. James Dobson: Something that occurs to me at this moment, they're an awful lot of pastors not in the military who are discouraged today. They've given their lives to their churches. We need to encourage them.

Wes Modder: I would be happy to do that, doctor. I don't want to be remiss, but the scriptures do say, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood."

Dr. James Dobson: Absolutely.

Wes Modder: There's a spiritual component here, and I would be remiss not to mention it. Whether you're in a civilian pulpit or a military institutional setting, the commission is the same. It's that we get to die, that we get to give our lives, and it takes us a while to get there. Sometimes it takes a crucible to get there, that if the Lord should see fit to use me in this way, then I need to be obedient to that. That's very hard for us to hear that.

Dr. James Dobson: I had a very well-known leader of a Christian ministry, one that everybody would know about if I identified it and him. We were sitting at a restaurant one time and he said to me, "If you stay there long enough, you will be stabbed in

the back." Those are harsh words, but I'm telling you, I know too many men and women that it's happened to, and when that comes, what I hope that person or those people will say is what you said, "Lord, I don't understand this. This makes no sense, but I came to serve You, and I'm not going to abandon the cause. In fact, I'm going to fight for what I believe."

Wes Modder: That's right, doctor, because our lives are not our own, and we become very selfish and very self-centered. I wanted promotion. I wanted recognition. I wanted a good FitRep. I wanted to do my job. I wanted the Lord pleased. Whenever society or the military or ministry requires you to make a decision between being faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ or its policies, its constitution, its charter, there's really no decision to be made.

Dr. James Dobson: Why didn't you just quit and go home?

Wes Modder: Because I've never quit. When I was a young Marine, I lost 82 pounds in 72 days. I went into the Marine Corps, and I didn't make one run. I was overweight and flat-footed. I passed out many times. I still hold the record, if you go to Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, my name's still up on the wall, and I've never been a quitter. I might not be first place. I might not even be second, but I'm going to give my heart to everything that I try to do, especially the kingdom of God.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I don't want to run out of time without telling the rest of your story. People came to aid, legal entities, Kelly Shackelford and his team, Family Research Council, General Boykin?

Wes Modder: That's correct, General Boykin.

Dr. James Dobson: You pulled in the heavy hitters here.

Wes Modder: I don't know how I did that. They came to me and called me hero, which I'm uncomfortable with, but they said, "Well, you're a hero, Chaplain Modder, because you stood, and we need people to stand and then you won." I can't really take credit for both.

Dr. James Dobson: For both. How did you win?

Wes Modder: Well, it went all the way up to the Navy personnel command, the general counsel, the lawyer there, and WilmerHale, the lead lawyer with WilmerHale, and they had conversations behind closed doors. Basically it went, If you do this, we'll do this. If you do that, we'll do this. If it goes to federal court, then we'll do this, and we'll take the fight because it's a First Amendment right. It's a religious liberty win for everybody, both on the left and right. It's not, again, a Wes Modder thing.

Dr. James Dobson: So many military leaders stepped in on your behalf?

Wes Modder: At the very end because they could see there was no way to win. Their arm was twisted. They didn't ultimately make the right decision, but they were coerced. I'm like, "Look, you're going to lose this. You're discriminating against a chaplain. Do you hear yourself? Do you see the charges? Do you actually believe what you've written down on paper? Are you willing to take this into the public arena?" I had to do that. I had to be willing to put my whole story online. That's how they fight. That's how we win is everything is public. Let the American people see that if you're in the military, you don't check in your faith, that if you're in the military, you have the right to worship God.

If the Muslims can worship Allah overseas, the American soldier has the right to be able to worship their God and pray. Chaplains are the ones that are bringing that component to the military to be that asset, that force multiplier to that commander. Why not? Why wouldn't America want to have a chaplain and a minister downrange, over the horizon in theater of combat that's praying out to God to give us favor and to counsel when there's a moral ethical issue? By definition, the Navy chaplain is a moral ethical advisor to the commander. I will not capitulate. I will not shade the truth when it comes to any topic, not just marriage. I am wearing a cross, and I'm also carrying a cross, and sometimes it is uncomfortable, to be honest.

Dr. James Dobson: That is so inspirational, it makes me cry. That's beautiful. That's what you did. Tell us about the moment you got the news. Where were you?

Wes Modder: I tell you, the news, they called me in. I thought I was going to the brig. I thought my career was over. They called me in, I was fired. I was at the local chapel and I had to get in my summer service whites. I had to report to the commanding officer and I sat there. I'm like, "I am going to die today." I sat there and they opened up this folder. I read it and I reread it, and I had to sign it, complete exoneration.

Dr. James Dobson: Did a commander speak to you about it?

Wes Modder: My CO did not give any, any feedback. It was a very stoic, silent moment. Time stopped.

Dr. James Dobson: He was against you.

Wes Modder: Well, you can tell. They're following orders. In the Obama's Administration, if you dissented, you're done. That's the way it works. So I took my papers without being emotional, I was holding tears. I got in my car. I said, "Lord, just let me get home. Let me get home to my wife." I got home to Beth. She's waiting. I said, "Can we go into the room?" I got into the room, and I began to weep with my wife, and she wept with me. It's my wife that was the strength and gave me the nobility of character that stood with me.

She's the champion. She's the hero, was my wife, my praying wife. I said, "It's over. It's done. I've won," and we just praised God. We dropped to our knees in our bedroom and we just said, "Lord Jesus, thank You, because You just did something we could have never done, so praise be to God." Then now I'm the pastor of Stone Church in Chicago. God had prepared me 33 years to go to this pulpit. I had no idea the church even existed. So today I am in this church, this 110-year old church, one of the oldest Assembly of God churches in the country with this incredible legacy. I said, "Lord, when I got that exoneration, I want You to write the chapter."

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we're missing something because-

Wes Modder: Yes, sir.

Dr. James Dobson: ... you'd been in for 19 years, and you stayed in for two more.

Wes Modder: That's right. So they let me pick my duty station. I went back to San Diego.

Dr. James Dobson: You picked your duty station.

Wes Modder: That's part of the humble pie. I picked it. I went back to San Diego. Of course, the Navy can get rid of you without breaking the law. When you do what I did, there's no recovery. So they gave me a non-career enhancing job and I was a-

Dr. James Dobson: One you could never be promoted in.

Wes Modder: Well, I was working for a man who I was senior to. I was working for a man who lost his way. Sometimes the institution can institutionalize you, and you're just drawing a paycheck and you have no more kingdom value. Other than being a human being, there are chaplains that are just institutionalized. They should become line officers. I never wanted that. So there I'm working for a guy in an office, and it was a dead end street. So it took me about a year to get my mind and my heart right. I dropped my retirement papers March 23rd-

Dr. James Dobson: And you retained your-

Wes Modder: ... and I won my case.

Dr. James Dobson: ... your pension?

Wes Modder: I got my pension. I didn't have to show a cause. I put the letters in frames. I framed the letters and put them in my office.

Dr. James Dobson: You're one gutsy man, I'll tell you.

Wes Modder: They're not in my current office right now, but I'll eventually pull them out and it's mixed feelings. I don't want to be antagonistic, but I just wanted to be obedient. I want the Lord pleased, but now all chaplains in all branches benefit.

Dr. James Dobson: You felt like your life was over, and it was really only beginning-

Wes Modder: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: ... because of what's happening now.

Wes Modder: That's what civilian pastors need to remember.

Dr. James Dobson: See, Satan will tell you, "You're done for. You're a failure. Watch out. You will never accomplish anything." God then shows up and says-

Wes Modder: He does.

Dr. James Dobson: ... "I've got a plan for you."

Wes Modder: You don't get that whole picture. You have to trust Him. You don't get to see over the horizon. You get to be obedient. God shows you just enough.

Dr. James Dobson: A lamp under your feet. I love that Scripture 'cause you can't see more than a yard with a lamp to your feet. All you can see is where to put the next foot.

Wes Modder: That's right. So I praise the Lord. I thank God for His faithfulness. I thank God for my wife, and we need to trust Jesus Christ. We need to trust Him in the darkest moments, and He faithfully comes through every time.

Dr. James Dobson: You need to write a book, man.

Wes Modder: I will write a book.

Dr. James Dobson: The next time you come here, you bring your wife. I want to meet her.

Wes Modder: I would be honored to, Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: She must have been stalwart for you during that time.

Wes Modder: She is an amazing woman. She's a homeschooler. She went back to work and she's encouraging me, and I'm like, "I can't believe the Lord gave me such an incredible wife to help me, because I just don't-

Dr. James Dobson: You and I are both blessed in that regard.

Wes Modder: ... even know what to say about it."

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I met you several months ago, just very quickly after you'd spoken. I hope you'll continue to speak. This is a message that must be heard. It's not just about the military.

Wes Modder: No.

Dr. James Dobson: It's really about the Christian walk. It's about those moments when the pieces don't fit and moments when you're discouraged and you just feel like that there's nothing left for you.

Wes Modder: I'll tell you, I wanted to say that the church is amazing. It was the church that helped step in, and so a lot of times pastors can be disillusioned, and people get discouraged. But the Psalmist says, "Why so downcast, O my soul, put your hope in God," not the Navy, not the FitRep, not a board, not a congregation, put your hope in Christ and let Him be God. It just works out much better that way.

Dr. James Dobson: Congratulations to you, sir-

Wes Modder: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: ... for keeping the faith and for standing strong.

Wes Modder: Praise the Lord.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's talk again.

Wes Modder: I look forward to it, doctor.

Roger Marsh: Dr. Wes Modder went home to be with the Lord in 2021. He is survived by his wife, Beth, and four grown children. If you would like to share Dr. Modder's inspiring story with a friend or a loved one, all you have to do is visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Now, before we leave the air for today, I want to announce that we have added the new Dobson Culture Center to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. It's designed to help families and individuals stand up against a broken culture with a biblical worldview. Joining me now is the senior director of the Dobson Culture Center, Dr. Owen Strachan.

Dr. Owen Strachan: Thanks for having me on.

Roger Marsh: We are committed to helping parents and grandparents equip kids and families to do battle with the cultural challenges to our faith. Talk about why this is so important, especially right here in 2024.

Dr. Owen Strachan: The culture is against the church in a very serious way, and so we find ourselves, air quotes, "on the wrong side of history today as believers in many different categories." But what we need to make clear to ourselves and to anyone who will listen with a earshot is this: We're standing on the solid rock of God's word.

So because of that firm foundation, we don't have to fear anything in this world, and we can even go beyond mere survival and promote God's truth and God's gospel and God's power in this world. We can know as we do so that the Holy Spirit is working and will give us strength for the mission before us. So we're not working from a position of weakness as Christians that we often feel that way, we're working from a position of strength.

Roger Marsh:

Indeed, Dr. Owen Strachan. There is more to come in the near future from Dr. Strachan and the Dobson Culture Center, so keep watching at drjamesdobson.org. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for making Family Talk a part of your day, and be sure to join us again tomorrow for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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