



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Beloved Unbeliever – Part 1

Guest(s): Jo Berry

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone and thank you for listening to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm James Dobson and I'm so glad that you've joined us for today's special program. We know from Scripture that marriage between one man and one woman is God's design for the institution of the family. I'm sure you have known that maybe all your life, but it bears repeating. It finds its origin in the first book of the Bible, Genesis 2:24, which reads, "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh." This is the basis for all culture and everything of value rests on it. Our organization, JDFI, is passionately dedicated to the preservation of biblical marriage. It's because of that conviction that I want to share today's program with you. What you're about to hear was recorded shortly after I founded Focus on a Family.

My guest that day was Jo Berry and she had come to discuss her book entitled *Beloved Unbeliever: Loving Your Husband Into the Faith*. That title may sound radical, but Jo's perspective is as relevant today as it was decades ago.

Jo Berry was a very special lady. She went home to be with the Lord just a few years after this interview was recorded, but she had a powerful influence on Christians. In addition to her books, Jo was a popular speaker, but her life ended after a battle with cancer. I used to wonder what else she could have accomplished if she had lived longer, but God's plan is always better than ours even when we don't understand it. Well, Jo and I had a riveting conversation that day in the studio. We spoke primarily to women who were unequally yoked. That means where one spouse is a practicing Christian and the other is not. And of course the pain and frustration increase when there are children involved. If you know someone who is unequally yoked in marriage, I hope you'll share this recording with them and with others. Let's listen now to part one of this edition of Family Talk.

A few minutes before you arrived, I asked a member of our staff to go through the files of our mail and just pull some of the letters that we've received from women whose husbands are not Christians. I have a whole stack here in front of me as you see.

Jo Berry: I'd love to see them.

Dr. James Dobson: And rather than try to read each one of them, I sat down and wrote a composite letter and I'd like to read it. Now, this is not a letter that's come from anyone, but it's a letter that's come from thousands. You know what I mean?

Jo Berry: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And I've seen it over and over and over again. Maybe it'll get us into the issues, "Dear Dr. Dobson, would you pray for my husband who's not a Christian? It puts me in such a difficult situation to try to serve the Lord and teach the children about Him, when I don't have the support of my husband in this important part of our lives. He goes places I feel I shouldn't go. He brings alcoholic beverages into the house and drinks them in front of the kids, and he uses bad language when he gets angry. Honestly, I love my husband, but it is so hard to live a Christian life when you must do it alone. What can I do to reach him? What should be my reaction with the kids? Is there any hope for me? Thanks for caring, Mrs. Christian homemaker."

I've seen that letter. Haven't you seen that letter many, many times?

Jo Berry: Yes. That heart cry. It's pain on paper, isn't it?

Dr. James Dobson: And that's what led you to write the book, isn't it?

Jo Berry: Yes, it is. It is.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, what kind of answer do you give to this woman? First of all, how'd she get into that mess? How does a Christian individual wind up with a person who has no interest in things of the Spirit?

Jo Berry: All right, before I answer that, I want to say that there is hope. There's a tremendous possibility, is there for a fulfilled, delightful, pleasant marriage even if the husband never becomes a Christian. And that's part of the essence of the book. Our hope is in Jesus Christ and He can give hope to that marriage. Now, one of the things that I found a common misconception in our churches that unequally yoked women perpetrate that other Christians believe, and that is that most women become unequally yoked because they're Christians and they marry unbelievers in disobedience to God's rule, not to. Well, that isn't the case. There are actually four ways that a believer becomes unequally yoked. One is that an unbeliever marries an unbeliever and then God draws the woman in His sovereignty into a relationship with him and does not draw the husband. That's not her fault. I mean she's not to blame there.

Another reason is that sometimes a man will actually make a woman think he is a Christian. They play the game, they learn the jargon, they go to church, they do everything right and then after they're married and the woman really thinks she's marrying a Christian and she isn't. And then a third way, and that was what happened to me was through ignorance. I came from the Midwest and I'm

sorry to say it, but where I came from, if you weren't Jewish, you were a Christian. And so since George wasn't a Jew, I assumed he was a Christian.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. You said you did not write this book from personal experience.

Jo Berry: Well, no, because it wasn't that much of an issue. A little testimony here, I strayed from the Lord from the time I was a teenager until I was in my thirties and the Lord got His hand back on me again and it was at that time that He pulled me back into the fold, He also drew George into the family of God. So it was almost like we came to Christ at the same time. Yes. So it really wasn't an issue. But one thing I did draw on from personal experience was that I married in ignorance. I didn't know that I wasn't supposed to marry someone that wasn't a Christian and I really thought George was a Christian. And then the fourth way is through disobedience, but very few women who know, have knowledge of the Scripture will purposely and willfully disobey that particular thing. I do know some who have because they thought they could get around it and they always find out they can't.

Dr. James Dobson: They thought they could change him too.

Jo Berry: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Paul refers in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "To not being unequally yoked". What does that mean in your interpretation of the Scripture?

Jo Berry: Well, in the book I talk about the actual structure of a yoke and it was made so that it puts equal weight on both people and they can pull the load together. And in any kind of a relationship, when you have a Christian who is in God's light with an unbeliever who is in the darkness, total darkness of sin, that's an unequal yoking because there's an unequal pulling there. And so the term unequally yoked, I don't think it only applies to marriage, it applies to business relationships, it applies to all sorts of situations in life. We teach our son that this applies to deep friendships. You don't yoke yourself up with someone who has different standards and values and believes differently than you do in personal intimate relationships. And so of course it certainly applies in marriage. What happens then in the Christian marrying an unbeliever is the Christian is pulling all of the spiritual load because they're married to someone who is unspiritual, totally unappraised spiritually.

Dr. James Dobson: That analogy to the yoke is interesting to me from many perspectives, but you just can't put an oxen and a horse together. It just will not work because they pull against each other, have a different gait and so on. And yet I watched a television program called Connections where it was showing what seemed to be minor inventions changed all of civilization and the construction of the first yoke was one of the most fantastic inventions of all time because it allowed man to harness the power of oxen and their staying power to turn the ground and so on. The applications to the family here are very interesting to me.

Jo Berry: Another thing that I thought was so interesting as I studied the structure of the yoke was that it was made so that if one pulled more than the other share, there was pain involved. It caused pain so that they would balance each other out.

Dr. James Dobson: Work together.

Jo Berry: Yes. And you certainly see that when you have a Christian woman married to an unbeliever, there is heartfelt pain involved in some instances, just the natural byproduct of the situation.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, if we are speaking at this moment to unmarried young men and women, the prescription of the Scripture is clear, isn't it?

Jo Berry: Very clear.

Dr. James Dobson: They should not be unequally yoked. They should not marry a person who's not a Christian.

Jo Berry: Well, light cannot fellowship with darkness. It's that simple.

Dr. James Dobson: How about dating? Would you recommend that a 16 year old girl or an 18 year old girl not date a non-Christian?

Jo Berry: I would recommend that for the very simple reason that hearts get hooked accidentally.

Dr. James Dobson: They sure do.

Jo Berry: And when they get hooked, then you're in the situation of having to break your heart one way or the other. And so just from a very practical standpoint, why put yourself in a position where that might happen to you?

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, Jo from your book now, tell me some of the common misconceptions about communication between unequally yoked wives and their husbands.

Jo Berry: All right. We have in Scripture what I call the 1 Peter 3 principle, which says, "If a husband is being disobedient to the word, that his wife is to win him without a word by her godly example," that's speaking I believe of just spiritual things. It means you can't preach your husband to Christ. You have to do it by the way you live your life. Of course, I think that's pretty true with most of us. We establish our example through the way we live and then God gives us an opportunity to say, "Well, I am a Christian and this is what's making me different." But first we have to act differently in front of other people. That's definitely true. You have to realize that you're dealing with someone who is spiritually dead and that regeneration is an act of the Holy Spirit. And God has chosen in this unequally yoked situation to use the wife as a vessel through the

way she acts and acts out her Christianity, which is a lot harder than talking about it.

Dr. James Dobson: You go so far as to say though that she should be very cautious and even verbally witnessing.

Jo Berry: Yes, I believe that. I believe that.

Dr. James Dobson: Explain your position.

Jo Berry: Our families know us better than anybody else. He can say, "Well fine. Why do I want to be a Christian? Look at you." It's very hard because you see, it's easier to say, "Let me tell you how to be a Christian than let me show you how to be one."

Dr. James Dobson: Especially at home.

Jo Berry: Especially at home. So the women that I interviewed for the book have said it's obvious we fail by what we do more than what we say. I can talk a good game as a Christian, but it's another thing to really act out all the Christian principles. But if I can show him through my actions what a Christian is, then it will make him want to be what I am and have what I have. I know many wives who have done what God has told them to do, they've been good wives, they've been helped meets, they've been counselors, they've communicated properly with their husbands and I do want to get back to that, who have been used as the vessels that God actually has used to bring the husband to Christ.

One lady that I knew and she had really lived through some horrendous situations with her husband. I mean he was a tyrant when it came to her going to church and he didn't... "You can go to Bible study, but I don't want to know when you're going and I don't want to hear anything about it." And as he saw how she handled the children and how she approached him and she had terrible frustration. She was ready to leave him one day at Bible study and then the next week she'd come back and everything was great and then she'd come back again and it was terrible again and he was horrible.

And so it was this roller coaster that she lived on. But one night, and this had been going on for about three years, she was standing in the kitchen doing the dishes and he walked in and he said, "I've decided that I want to turn my life over to the Lord," and she prayed with him.

Dr. James Dobson: Isn't that fantastic?

Jo Berry: And he told her, he says, "It was your consistency. It was your consistency in sticking to what you believed and yet still loving me and putting up with me that did it." So you see there's hope if we do it God's way.

Dr. James Dobson: The letter that I wrote and read a few minutes ago describes some of the difficulties that unequally yoked partners experience. Describe for me what you see as the primary problems that a woman faces when her husband's not a Christian.

Jo Berry: All right. One is that she feels her marriage is so much different than if she were married to a Christian. We learn from Scripture what an ideal marriage is supposed to be. Hopefully when you have a Christian married to another Christian, as you walk in the Spirit and you grow in the Lord, your marriage does mature toward the ideal that Scripture has set forth. But there's no married couple in the world, Christians or unbelievers or mixed whatever, that don't have problems, that don't get angry with one another and that don't run into situations. Part of it I think is because of the teaching on marriage that's done in the church. We teach a lot about Christian marriages and what is possible through Christ in a marriage. These women think that their marriage is so different that they almost in their mind downgrade their marriage because their married to someone and they feel that their marriage is less than it should be.

Dr. James Dobson: It's an inferior relationship.

Jo Berry: It's an inferiority thing. And that is terribly detrimental to any relationship.

Dr. James Dobson: How about the matter of the husband being jealous of the wife's relationship with Jesus? He knows that she loves Jesus more than she loves him as it should be in a different kind of love or jealous of the time that she spends at church and with church friends and so on.

Jo Berry: This is also a very common problem. The ladies that I spoke to about this said that the way they handle it is they have had to learn not to in their own lives make the Lord an issue with their husbands. They have to not make church attendance an issue. They have to not make issues out of spiritual things because the husband doesn't understand that. One of the gals that I talked to said that she went off on a church retreat and her husband who was an unbeliever was very understanding about that. He saw it as her going away with her friends and wanting to be with her friends and enjoying a weekend away. And he kept the children and he was a nice guy. And then when he wanted to go away for a weekend with his friend skiing, she threw a fit. I mean, "You always are wanting to be away from the children and spending money on this," and so on and so forth.

And she said, she was thinking her mind, "A Christian husband wouldn't do this. He wouldn't go off and leave his wife to go skiing." Well, I've got news for her, but they seemed to draw this line and she said when she realized what she was doing, she was really ashamed of herself because in her husband's thinking, she was off with her friends at a church thing and he was off with his friends skiing and he didn't draw that line. Now she was fortunate that he wasn't jealous. Some husbands are, and that's very normal because you're in a love relationship with Jesus Christ.

Dr. James Dobson: That's right. That's right. And He's got to be in first place too.

Jo Berry: And He's got to be in first place. But one of the things that they have to understand is that I'm sure the Lord does not want to interfere with that marriage. He wants to enhance it and therefore I'm sure that Jesus Himself wants to cultivate that love relationship with the Christian while at the same time helping her build up her marriage.

Dr. James Dobson: But He did say your greatest enemies will be right in your own home.

Jo Berry: Right in your own home. That's right. That's absolutely correct.

Dr. James Dobson: In terms of trying to take up your cross and follow Him.

Jo Berry: The smartest thing to do in a case where that jealousy exists is to work toward compromise. If the husband and wife have always had Sunday mornings together to do things and then all of a sudden she's wanting to go off to church every single Sunday morning, he does feel left out. He feels completely shut out. And if she takes the attitude, "Well, all you have to do is come with me and it'll be fine," that's not going to accomplish anything.

So what I have advised women in situations like this and they have told me that it does work, a lot of them that have been in this situation have shared with me. It's one of the points I got from my advice is that there are other times if at all possible that you can worship, if you try not to make issues of spiritual things, the jealousy subsides. So if a husband absolutely needs you on Sunday morning, fine, then go to a Bible study during the week. Maybe you can catch a program on television. You can listen to tapes. You can maybe go to Wednesday night services. There are a lot of compromises that you can work out.

Dr. James Dobson: You would agree with me, I'm sure, Jo, that the compromises must be on items and issues that are not substantial to the faith.

Jo Berry: Yes. That cannot affect your faith or pull you away from the Lord. Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's look at some of those. Let's suppose that your husband likes to go to bars and likes to drink and he wants you to accompany him even if you don't drink, what are you going to do?

Jo Berry: The thing that I say in the book, and this is again, a lot of this is advice that I got from women who have been in this situation, is that if it's sin, you don't do it. If your husband wants you to go to pornographic movies, that is obviously nurturing the lust of the flesh, which is stated clearly in Scripture is a sin and you don't go. If your husband asks you to lie on your income tax return, you don't do it. Lying is a sin. It's stated very clearly in Scripture, you don't bear a false witness and you don't do it. But a lot of the women I talked to said that they see these opportunities of going out and being in these situations as opportunities

to share the example. They take Christ with them, they take the Holy Spirit with them. They don't have to taint themselves by going and so they go and they are a support system to their husband as any wife should be.

Dr. James Dobson: That takes a strong woman though, doesn't it? Because you're going into a sinful setting and trying to maintain a Christian atmosphere and you better have your feet on the ground in order to do that.

Jo Berry: Well, yes, I guess that's true. I don't know. I know from my point of view, and of course I'm married to a Christian, there are situations where with my husband's work, we have to go to these kinds of things. It's part of his job. And this hasn't affected our Christianity any. As a matter of fact, we've had opportunities to really minister sometimes as the outgrowth of relationships that have developed for years. Just because you're out where sinners are, which was where Christ spent a great deal of his time, doesn't mean you have to sin.

Dr. James Dobson: I certainly agree with that. But you having the support and having a communality with your husband going into a situation like that, it's a little different than a woman who's not only alone in it, but whose husband may be saying, "Come on, participate. Be part of it, drink. Here I want you to go along with me. Not only be here but be part of what's happening," and if she's intimidated, if she is not terribly strong in her faith, she could find herself living a life not much different from those that are outside the faith.

Jo Berry: That's true. But again, the women that I have talked to as I interviewed for the book felt that they did not see that as a problem as much as if they refused to go and their husbands went anyway, which they definitely would do. It caused deeper problems in the marriage than if the wife did go.

Dr. James Dobson: How about the matter of the children? I see the greatest problems in that area in trying to bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. He doesn't like it. He puts on a different example, a different model for them. What in the world does a woman do in that situation?

Jo Berry: I have a chapter on that in the book called "Shouldering Spiritual Responsibility" because it is the parental duty of the Christian mother to raise her children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And if her husband is not a Christian, she has that to handle all by herself. And that is difficult. The children do need to be in Sunday school and church. They need to develop those habit patterns. They need to be exposed to Christian friends. They need to be taught in the Scriptures. They need to be prayed with. Most husbands who are unbelievers, as long as it really doesn't interfere with too much with their lifestyle or discomfort, don't take great exception to that. There are some who do, but the wife still doesn't get, like you say, the support system like I do when we're raising our children, we're both praying together, we have the influence of the Holy Spirit in both of our lives leading even when I think one thing should be done and George thinks another thing should be done, we sit down and reason it through together and come up with this.

And one of the things that was in that letter was, "What do I do when he swears and he says bad words?" And I suggest in the book that you simply say, "Look, daddy is not a Christian. He doesn't believe in Jesus and we do. And so there are some things that he's going to do that Christians don't do. That doesn't mean that daddy's a bad man or that we shouldn't love him. It just simply means that some of those things are going to be different, but that we're going to not act that way because we're going to show him through the way we live how Christians are supposed to act."

Dr. James Dobson: Let's really get tough now Jo. I am your husband. You're a Christian, I'm not and I'm mad about it. And I say, "Now look, I've had enough of this Jesus stuff, especially with my kids. I don't want them distorted. I don't want them growing up with all that guilt hanging on him. And I don't want to hear you mention His name in the family and I don't want you praying with those kids and I don't want you taking them to church. And I'm telling you, don't do it," now what?

Jo Berry: Well, that's like answering how do I solve a universal problem? Each situation is different. A lot of it depends on the personality of the wife involved actually. But again, all I can tell you is what I would do and what other women have told me they have done in the same situation. And that is, I'd say, "All right, when you are around, we will try not to talk about the Lord in front of you. I will not pray with our children because that's an important part of my faith and it's something that I am commanded by God to do. But we will not pray in front of you. I will not read the Bible with them when you are here. We won't take time away from you for that."

And as far as the church thing, some women have shared that they have gone as far as to send their children to church and spend time with their husbands if that will help appease. I would probably, knowing my personality, go ahead and take the children to Sunday school at least quite frequently because I think again, we have the charge in Acts that we must serve God rather than man. So if there is a choice to be made, even if that man is your husband, you have to obey God. And we do have commandments as parents to raise our children in the Lord.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm really glad to hear you say what you just said because I agree absolutely with it. There are Christian leaders who don't. There are Christian leaders who would identify the term submission as putting the obligation on the wife to wait for her husband to suddenly wake up spiritually. By the time he does that, the kids may be on their way to Hell.

Jo Berry: He may never do that. You see, you can't assume that he's ever going to become a Christian. These wives can't live. They can live with that hope, but they cannot live with that as a fact day to day.

Dr. James Dobson: And in the absence of that, somebody has got to teach those kids.

Jo Berry: That's absolutely right.

Dr. James Dobson: And I feel so strongly that they should not antagonize him, they should not throw Christ in his face. They shouldn't be pious. They shouldn't flaunt their prayer and all the rest of it. But somebody has to take those kids to church and somebody has got to pray with them and teach them and train them and guide them. And if the father isn't going to do it, the mother has to do it and I feel very strongly about that issue.

Jo Berry: I know of one instance where a man who was taking the stance that you just hypothetically put to me, and one night he was listening, his little three year old, a three year old, was praying a very precious prayer about, "Bless my daddy and let him know how much we love him and let him know how much Jesus loves him and please make him to be a Christian so that we can all be a happy family." And this man was so touched that he started weeping and he started going to church and listening and was... I think it was probably a two-year period before he actually committed to Christ, but that child was a turning point.

Roger Marsh: Wow. What a heart melting story here on Family Talk. It sure is amazing how God used that little girl to bring her dad to come to love the Lord. And friend, if you want to hear more of Dr. Dobson's conversation with his guest, Jo Berry, be sure to tune into part two of this conversation on tomorrow's edition of Family Talk. And by the way, if you're interested in learning more about Jo's book entitled *Beloved Unbeliever: Loving Your Husband Into the Faith*, visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. As we heard on today's broadcast, there are lots of different ways a husband and wife may one day realize that they are in an unequally yoked marriage. When that realization takes place, it is important to remember that there is hope for a marriage like that. I pray that as you've been listening to today's program and coming to the realization that you're living with a husband or a wife that Jo Berry would refer to as a beloved unbeliever, please know that with God's help, He will reach your spouse and transform your relationship with each other.

Dr. Dobson has written a book that's become a classic that deals with this very issue, it's called *Love Must Be Tough: New Hope for Marriages in Crisis*. We'll be happy to send you a copy of this book as our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute today. Just click on the link on today's broadcast page when you go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and follow the prompts from there. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. You'll find the link for the book *Love Must Be Tough: New Hope for Marriages in Crisis* on our broadcast page. Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Hope you have a blessed 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.