



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Dr. Dobson: More Untold Stories – Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. James Dobson

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Dr. James Dobson: Well hello, everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener-supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Roger Marsh: Well welcome, everyone, to another edition of Family Talk with your host, psychologist and bestselling author, Dr. James Dobson. I'm Roger Marsh. Want to take a moment to thank everyone who made a donation to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute last month while we had our special matching grant in place. Thanks to your generosity, we will be able to reach twice as many families and marriages because that match was a dollar-for-dollar match. Now today on the program, I am excited to bring you the conclusion of a classic interview I conducted with Dr. Dobson a few years ago. Now in today's installment, we'll get to know more about who Dr. James Dobson is, his personality, his likes, and his dislikes. We'll also get a chance to hear other opportunities he has had outside of radio. Well, there's a lot to cover in this broadcast, so here now is the conclusion of this special episode featuring me, Roger Marsh, and our own Dr. James Dobson right now on Family Talk.

Dr. Dobson, you've written 30 books. You are a prolific author and a voracious reader. But I wonder, do you have one of your books that is a favorite of yours and which one is it?

Dr. James Dobson: That's a really hard question to answer and I've been asked that question many times. And frankly, I've usually refused to answer because it depends on who needs the book. If you're raising toddlers or you're raising daughters, those are the books that you need, or any number of others when God doesn't make sense for those who've lost a spouse or have lost a child. When I was at Children's Hospital, I struggled with these babies that suffer and die and they never know even why they are in such pain. That's very difficult to answer. And finally, I came to the point where I said, "Lord, if you'd wanted me to answer this question, you'd have given me more information. I can't explain it, but someday I will and I trust you. And in the meantime, I take one step at a time and you promised you would be a light into my path." So it depends on, really, what the need is.

But speaking personally, if I had to select one and was forced to do it would be *Love Must Be Tough* because so many families are falling apart and that book has saved marriages, thousands of them. I hear from them. I know it. There are techniques for how to pull a wayward spouse back into a relationship when counseling won't work because counseling requires two.

Roger Marsh:

Yes.

Dr. James Dobson:

Two people have to be engaged with a counselor and there has to be a desire to save it. Many times when marriages are falling apart, one wants out, is looking for a way to escape and feels trapped and does not even want to go for counseling. That is very typical when the person has already made up their mind. I want to tell you something else. Usually when that's the case, there is another lover somewhere. When they don't want to talk about it, when they begin blaming you and saying, "It's not my fault," conflict in marriage usually requires two people. But when it's all blamed on one, the one that it's blamed on is doing everything he can or she can to hold it together. This book is written for that situation.

Roger Marsh:

Dr. Dobson, I know you're a big movie buff, and we'll put you on the spot here now as we're turning the tables, and ask you what your favorite movie is. Do you have a favorite style? Is there a favorite all-time movie if you had to pick just one?

Dr. James Dobson:

Action movies do not attract me at all. I'm most interested in character development movies where there is a story of drama of people. And I like history. Maybe my favorite is *Anne of a Thousand Days*, Richard Burton playing Henry VIII. That's a powerful movie. I'm most likely to like movies that pull you into some true aspect of history. And I don't like movies with profanity. I don't like God's name used in vain. Now when I get in that situation, I may walk out. I may leave because God is holy and He's not to be mocked. He is not mocked. To use Jesus' name in vain, I'm telling you, I just think that we've been subjected to creative products that have damaged this country and especially children, so I don't like that. I don't like murder, I don't enjoy seeing that kind of criminal activity, but I think I've come as close as I can get to what I do like.

Roger Marsh:

Yeah. But you mentioned something about the historical movies and the periods that they come out from. Talk about those, how they influence you.

Dr. James Dobson:

Well, Shirley and I love the 1930 movies, 1940.

Roger Marsh:

Sure.

Dr. James Dobson:

We really enjoy the classics, the old classics going way, way back, the old Hollywood movies. Some of them are absolutely phenomenal. Probably if we were going to watch a movie tonight, it would be something from Turner Classic Movies.

Roger Marsh: Right. With the big dance numbers and all those things, yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, yeah. I love Fred Astaire. People are going to say, "Man, that's Father Time speaking." I bet I'm not the only one.

Roger Marsh: Oh, I'm sure you're in good company. Okay, you gave us a little bit of a glimpse here. You said if you and Shirley were going to watch a movie tonight. What do you guys like to do for fun besides watching movies?

Dr. James Dobson: This will really sound strange to some people, but if I have a weekend to spend in some way, what I would most enjoy doing is spending it with Shirley, the two of us in a house. We will probably cook together. And Shirley and I will be doing our own thing, but in the house together. Just being with her. Isn't that amazing? I still enjoy her company. I still find her interesting. I still like to talk to her and to hear her talk to me. Just the pleasure of being with this woman that God gave me.

Roger Marsh: Well, Dr. Dobson, you and Shirley met in college during your undergraduate studies. Obviously, there was some graduate work that went along with it. I'm glad you chose USC, but how did you come to choose that path?

Dr. James Dobson: That is an interesting story, at least it's interesting to me because I applied and was accepted. I remember the very first night that I went to USC to register and there were 15,000 students lined up to register that night.

Roger Marsh: Oh, my.

Dr. James Dobson: And on the way over there I had prayed and I said, "Lord, I really don't know what I'm going to experience here. I don't know if my faith is going to be honored and I really don't know what is coming here, but I ask you to be with me. I just ask you to bless me because I think I'm doing this because you want me to." And so I got over there and found a parking space and I went on the main campus there, and here were 15,000 students lined up and I'm at the end of the line.

Roger Marsh: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: And I'm standing there wondering if it'll be 4:00 in the morning by the time I get a chance to register. There was a man there named Ken Hopkins who I had known in undergraduate school. He was a brilliant guy, still is, and he had gone on and gotten his Ph.D. And by that point, he was a professor at USC in my field. He sees me over there ...

Roger Marsh: Out of tens of thousands of people.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. How he found me, I don't know, but he walked over and put his arm around me and said, "I'm so glad you're here. Listen, you don't need to stand in

this line. Come with me," and he took me up to his office in one of the buildings and he said, "I want you to know something. I believe in you and I am going to walk you through this process."

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Dr. James Dobson: "Not just registering, but the whole academic program, the Ph.D. And I'll tell you the courses to take, I'll tell you the professors that you should seek to be in their classes, and I will be your advisor for your thesis and your dissertation, and I'll walk you through this whole thing."

Roger Marsh: Incredible.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, you talk about a gift from the Lord. He's in my faith community. He knows everything about my understanding of Scripture and what I believe. And here the Lord put that man right in that key spot and moment, and I just was praising the Lord.

Roger Marsh: I mean, to be kind, Dr. Dobson, I think of you as a mentor for so many people, that legacy of faith for so many people. I've never once thought, "I wonder who his mentor is," and this is a huge mentoring moment for you.

Dr. James Dobson: Ken Hopkins was one of them. Dr. Ken Hopkins. He just made an unbelievable contribution to my life. And I had to have a certain number of units to get a Ph.D. There was all kinds of other requirements. It took me seven years to do it because two of the years were teaching school. In Child Development, you have to teach in public schools for two years because you learn how children think and act and how to influence.

Roger Marsh: So you were a teacher in the classroom?

Dr. James Dobson: I was. I was a public school teacher for two years at the elementary school.

Roger Marsh: What grades?

Dr. James Dobson: Sixth grade, and then I went on into junior high. I had 230 junior high students every day.

Roger Marsh: Oh, my.

Dr. James Dobson: I taught science and math. And then I was a counselor in high school, so I had a number of years of public school duty. Then when I finished my degree, I immediately left public schools and joined the faculty of USC School of Medicine and the attending staff of Children's Hospital because my field was child development, my minor was research design, and I was in a research role there in an academic setting and I loved it. I loved academia and I could have spent the rest of my life there, Roger.

Roger Marsh: What made you change? There had to be something that pivoted that.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, right along that same time, I began noticing that the American family was falling apart.

Roger Marsh: This is the late 60s.

Dr. James Dobson: Late 60s and then early 70s. And I was observing that parents didn't know or had forgotten why they need to lead their children and raise them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. And so at the time that I was in academia doing research and loving that, I was a director of a study that was being done in 15 major medical centers. I loved all that. I could have spent the rest of my life doing that.

Roger Marsh: I can tell.

Dr. James Dobson: But my concern was for what was happening to the family. And I did the scariest thing I've ever done. I resigned from that plum of a position. It really was. And if the Lord had had me remain on an academic campus for the rest of my life, I'd have been happy doing it, but I felt a higher calling. And so I went in to see the chief pediatrician of USC, his name was Dr. Donnell, and I went into him and I said, "I would like a leave of absence to make sure I'm doing the right thing." His answer in a nutshell was that, "The position you're in, I could fill with a pediatrician. I have somebody in mind that I could put in there for one year, but you're going to have to promise me that you will come back. Because I won't hold your job, your position, if you're not going to come back." And I said, "Dr. Donnell, I promise you I will come back." That was 1976.

And so I was out there writing books for families. *Dare to Discipline* had come out, it sold a million copies, and I was enjoying what I was doing and I started Focus on the Family. I started on 34 stations once a week. And within several years, I was heard on 400 stations and it was just going through the roof. And so I went back to talk to Dr. Donnell. This was after one year.

Roger Marsh: As you promised you would.

Dr. James Dobson: And I went in to see him and I had been praying, "Lord, I don't know what to tell this man. I promised him I'd come back, and I will have to if he wants me to, but I would really like to continue this work in a Christian, frame of reference, Focus on the Family. So I walked in and he stood. And before he asked me to sit down, he said, "Listen, I know you've got something to say to me, but I want to say something to you first. I know I told you you had to come back and that I was going to put somebody in your position. But I've heard what's happened to you and I've heard the things that you're doing, and I think it would be unfair of me to demand that you come back. So I'll tell you what. You can remain as a professor, an associate clinical professor of pediatrics, and have all of your titles,

and everything that you have done can continue. And when we need you, we'll call you, but you go do what you feel called to do."

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Dr. James Dobson: And I cried on the way home because the Lord had spoken again. And so I continued in the medical school till 1983.

Roger Marsh: Well, Dr. Dobson, it sounds like you were taking a huge leap of faith here. You had written a book on mental retardation prior to *Dare to Discipline*.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Roger Marsh: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Everybody thinks my first book was *Dare to Discipline*. It was actually a graduate textbook for medical students on what's now called mental disabilities. It was mental retardation in those days. The title of the book was *The Mentally Retarded Child and His Family* and I co-wrote it with Dr. Richard Koch, who was a world renowned pediatrician. We did that book together and it was very successful in an academic way. It wasn't the kind of thing that you write for parents.

Roger Marsh: Sure. Dozens of people read it, I'm sure. Compared to the millions, then, that would follow with *Dare to Discipline*.

Dr. James Dobson: Dr. James Dobson was doing the splits because I was still working in the university. I was still doing research on this disorder called phenylketonuria. Some parents out there are going to recognize it. If you've had a child in the last 25 years, at the hospital on the third day, they have pricked the heel of your child and taken a drop of blood.

Roger Marsh: Yes, I remember.

Dr. James Dobson: They're looking for a disorder called phenylketonuria and it's an enzyme problem that causes mental retardation if it is not identified early and treated. And I was working on a process ... I wasn't the only one. There were 150 doctors doing this ... to prevent the retardation that occurs from not having that enzyme, and so they have to be on a special diet that prevents the retardation. So all of that was going on, and then over here, I'm on television and doing writing and speaking. I was getting hundreds and hundreds of speaking requests.

Roger Marsh: What was that like for you? I mean, you talk about the musty libraries and the research and everything, and now it's bright lights and camera and people are getting your opinion. Did something flick on for you at that point?

Dr. James Dobson: It was overwhelming to me.

Roger Marsh: I'll bet.

Dr. James Dobson: Because I had both these worlds going and I'm interested in both of them, but the literature in each field is different and it's almost impossible to keep up with both aspects of what had come to me, and so we had to do some praying to talk about what do we do next. In 1976 is when I got permission from the university to take a leave of absence and I've never looked back.

Roger Marsh: Did Shirley support at this time?

Dr. James Dobson: The whole way.

Roger Marsh: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: She's been right there with me and for me. The only thing she asked when I left the university, she had gotten used to eating two or three times a day and she said to me, "Are you sure that we can make it doing this?" But my books were selling. So I mean, the Lord went with me and I opened a little two room office, called it Focus on the Family, and the rest is really history.

Roger Marsh: Who surprised you the most when you were getting into the media world? You're doing television interviews, radio interviews. I think of the big names who would look at someone like you and say, "We've never heard of this guy. This book is selling like crazy." Was there an interviewer or a reporter that surprised you in terms of the way that they seemed to get what you were doing, what you were onto?

Dr. James Dobson: I am uncomfortable being really honest with you about what happened, but my world exploded.

Roger Marsh: Sure.

Dr. James Dobson: I was in a prestigious position at a big medical school, doing research and writing books, and the whole world opened up to me. It really did. And the television that I was doing, I was on The Dinah Shore Show. I don't know if you remember that.

Roger Marsh: It was a big deal in the 70s. Oh, yeah. I loved that show.

Dr. James Dobson: That was a big program and I was asked to be a regular on her show, and things went upward from there. All this time, I'm now doing Focus on the Family, but there is this secular television and writing and the other things. Let tell you one story that I have not shared often. Larry King was in his heyday, it was about 1983 by this time, and he invited me to come and be a guest on his show. And as a result of that experience, the president of the Mutual Broadcasting

Company called me and asked me a question. He had heard me on Larry King and he said, "I would like to make you another Larry King. I would like to give you the kind of gig that he has."

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Dr. James Dobson: "Because I think you can do that." Well, I went so far as to allow Marty Rubenstein to put me on a national radio hookup. It was sponsored by Purex and it was on a Sunday night. And afterwards, Marty said, "Let me know if you want this," what he called a gig. "If you want this gig, you can have it." And I was faced with a tremendous dilemma because I would've, first of all, had to have disbanded Focus on the Family, which by that point was on 400 or 500 stations and growing like Topsy. There were a few years there where we tripled in size.

Roger Marsh: Incredible.

Dr. James Dobson: And all of that would've had to have gone away. And I would have then been involved practically every week of the year in radio. And what does that mean for my family?

Roger Marsh: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: We like to ski together. Does that mean we're not going to be able to go skiing? Does that mean that I would spend less time with Shirley? There was glamour and glitz associated with this.

Roger Marsh: Sure.

Dr. James Dobson: And there was a lot of money associated with it, but is that what's calling me? Is that what I ought to do?

Roger Marsh: And to answer your own question with one of your own resources, I think back just a few years earlier. The Focus on the Family Film series comes out.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Roger Marsh: And it would almost be like you would be disbanding all of that and saying, "Well, that really didn't matter."

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Roger Marsh: And of course, obviously, it did matter. You gave up your very prestigious career at the hospital to say, "I'm going to stick my neck out and take a step out in faith.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that film series was seen by 83 million people. So I was walking away from that in a sense, too, and speaking at churches and other things. It would've just

completely redesigned my life and my family, and Shirley and I prayed about it and I turned it down. And looking back on it now, that was an enticing offer, but it was a turn in the road that I wasn't prepared to take, and I said no.

Roger Marsh:

Well, I hope you've enjoyed getting to know more about Dr. James Dobson and how he got to where he is today as you've been listening to this classic episode of Family Talk. Now in case you missed the first part of this conversation, be sure to head over to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. There you can listen to both parts one and two, and even share them with a friend or family member. Again, that's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Here at Family Talk, we care deeply about you and your family, and we want to be a comfort to you through life's more difficult times. Now if you're dealing with a rebellious child right now or if you and your spouse are really struggling to connect, please know we want to help. There are many resources available to you and all you have to do to access them is go to drjamesdobson.org and click on the resources button. While you're there, you can look through our massive library of articles and books, DVDs, free downloads, and more, all dedicated to issues facing the family. Again, go to drjamesdobson.org and then click onto the resources button.

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Announcer:

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