



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Teaching Girls to Be Ladies

Guest(s): N/A

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Announcer: Today, on Family Talk:

Roger Marsh: Over the last 20 years, there's been a startling rise in rude and obscene behavior from young people. This directly contradicts many parents' efforts to teach their kids kindness, respect and decency. The biggest victim in this battle for civility is the hearts and minds of young women. Somewhere amidst the feminist movement, girls assumed that societal approval to act or talk any way they wanted was perfectly fine. This shift has caused monumental consequences on our society because, as we will learn today, women have a profound impact on the moral fabric of this country. You've tuned to Family Talk, the radio broadcast division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and today we will outline the importance of a woman's godly behavior and character in society. In a moment, you're going to hear Dr. Dobson reading from a portion of his popular book, *Bringing Up Girls*. He will highlight the chapter titled, "Teaching Girls to be Ladies."

Now, this presentation is not just about instilling good manners in young women. It also addresses the way women deserve to be treated, and celebrates femininity, which was created by God. Here now is Dr. James Dobson reading an excerpt from his book, *Bringing Up Girls*, on this edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Dobson: Having explored a few of the neurological and physiological intricacies of the human female brain, let's take the next logical step and consider how girls should be raised. That'll take us from nature, where we began, to nurture, which is another infinitely complex subject. To address it, I want to step back a couple of hundred years and get a running start at the principles that matter most. The ideas and perspectives I will share were true two centuries ago, and they're precisely on target today.

We begin by revisiting the beliefs and writings of the second President of the United States, John Adams. He was a prolific reader, statesman and author, and he made an incalculable contribution to our country. He was not a perfect man, but he lived by a standard of righteousness throughout his adult life. In his

autobiography, Adams wrote a commentary on the subject of moral behavior, which he called "manners." Though the language is formal and dated, I urge you to listen to these words carefully and thoughtfully. They carry great meaning for us today.

Adams wrote, "From all that I read of history and government, of human life and manners, I have drawn this conclusion: that the manners of women are the most infallible barometer to ascertain the degree of morality and virtue in a nation. All that I've since read and all the observation I've made in different nations have confirmed me in this opinion. Manners of women are the surest criterion by which to determine whether a republican government is practicable in a nation or not. The foundations of national morality must be laid in private families. In vain are schools, academies and universities instituted if loose principles and licentious habits are not impressed upon children in their earliest years," and this is the key sentence, "The mothers are the earliest and most important instructors of youth."

How insightful it is that Adams placed the responsibility for the essential moral character of the nation squarely on the shoulders of mothers. Fathers play a key role too, of course, but moms are absolutely indispensable. It is their primary task to transmit enduring principles of right and wrong to the next generation. The old proverb is still true, that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. "If women grow weary of that responsibility, or if they lose sight of their own moral compass, no other institution or governmental agency will be able to save the nation," so wrote President John Adams. To paraphrase, Adams was saying that a representative form of government such as ours cannot survive without a spiritual foundation because its citizens are masters of their own destinies. That is the great vulnerability of a democracy.

Our political system, which Abraham Lincoln said is intended to be of the people, by the people, for the people, can be no more stable than the collective character of its citizenry. It's all up to us. There is no king, dictator or tyrant to restrain our behavior. If we choose evil, there will be no stopping us. In short, our national sovereignty depends on the transmission of the nation's morals and manners to children. That task should begin in the nursery, but what form does this early training take in today's world? It begins with basic civility, because manners and morals are directly connected. As Horace Mann said, "Manners easily and rapidly mature into morals." The first tends to lead to the second.

In centuries past, cultured and religious families understood this relationship. They were aware that girls and boys, and all of humanity, are flawed and inherently sinful. Thus, old English and early American societies worked diligently at teaching what were called the social graces. Teaching manners was their highest priority because of the connection to Christian piety. Alas, American and British cultures in the 21st century have swung to the other end of the continuum. Young girls are often allowed and even encouraged to be brash, rude, crude, profane, immodest, immoral, loud and aggressive. Some of

this behavior has been consciously taught in recent years under the rubric of “assertiveness training.” To the extent that such programs were designed to instill confidence in bashful, frightened young women, I supported them, but some girls have been taught the worst characteristics of uncivil males. I know my words must sound horribly old fashioned and archaic at this point, but there is something important here for us to consider.

Obviously human nature has not improved much in the past several hundred years, nor will it ever. What has changed, as I have described, is that many parents have become far too distracted, overworked and stressed out to care much about teaching morals and manners to their children. Jolene Savage, who runs the Social Graces School of Etiquette in Topeka, Kansas, says society has reached an all-time low when it comes to matters of civility. Exhausted moms and dads seem not to have noticed what has happened to their children. Clearly, instruction and civility is needed now more than ever. Getting that done, however, can be a challenge.

Once again, speaking directly to mothers, it's your job to acculturate your daughters and to help them become ladies. Does that sound chauvinistic in our high tech world? I suppose it does, but even so, it makes sense. As Lisa Fischer, an instructor at the Final Touch Finishing School in Seattle, Washington said, "Etiquette has to do with knowing the rules. Therefore, girls should be taught how to eat, talk, walk, dress, converse on the telephone, and respond to adults with respect and poise. Parents should demonstrate good posture and table manners for them, such as putting a napkin in the lap, showing them where to place silverware, and not talking with food in their mouths. They should also explain that burping and gobbling food and picking teeth are rude."

"I also firmly believe that you should require your kids to say thank you and please, to demonstrate that ours is not a gimme gimme world. Appreciation is an attitude best cultivated at home. Teach techniques of personal grooming, hygiene and nutrition. Role play with them about being gracious hosts and how to formally introduce parents or friends to each other. Require them to excuse themselves when leaving the table, and explain how to make friends, how to take turns talking in a group, and how to make eye contact. You might even help them learn how to cook and care for children. Wouldn't that be something novel?"

Although I'm not an expert in teaching girls some of the social graces that I've named - I learned a masculine version of the rules - I know them when I see them. Let me offer a technique that I came across several years ago. It's designed to teach boys and girls the art of conversation. I've shared it before, but I include it here for the benefit of those who haven't been paying attention. It begins by facing your daughter about six feet away and telling her that you're going to play a game together. Then call attention to the tennis ball that you're holding, which you proceed the bounce in her direction. After she catches the ball, stand there looking at each other for a moment before saying, "It isn't much fun if you hold a ball, is it? Why don't you throw it back?" Your daughter

will probably return the ball rather quickly. Stand motionless for a few seconds and then say, "Okay, I'm sending it back to you now." The child will be curious about what's going on. Then sit down together and describe the meaning of the game.

Tell her that talking together is a game called conversation, and it only works if the ball is thrown back. If a person bounces a question to you and you hold it, the game ends. Neither you nor the partner has any fun, but if you throw it back, you're playing the game properly. Follow up by saying, "Suppose I ask, 'Did you like the book you've been reading?' I have thrown the ball to you. If you simply say 'yes' in reply, then you have caught and held the ball, but if you say, 'The book was very interesting. I like reading about animals,' you've thrown the ball back." Then tell the child, "I can keep the conversation going by asking what kind of animals interest you most. If you say 'dogs,' then you have held the ball again, but if you tell me, 'I like dogs because they're warm and cuddly,' the ball has been bounced back to me. The idea is to keep the game going until the two of us have finished talking." Kids usually catch onto this game quickly. Afterwards, you can build on the concept by commenting on interchanges that occur with friends and adults.

While manners tend to facilitate morals, there's another reason to teach them. They also help develop confidence and poise. A girl who has been trained properly is never completely knocked off balance when she's in an unfamiliar circumstance. She knows what's expected of her and how to deal with it. Her sense of self-worth is reinforced by the way adults react to her charm, poise and grace. For the mother who wants to give her daughter a head start in life and help her compete socially, this is a great place to begin. These diverse skills used to be taught to girls in mandatory homemaking classes. Alas, most of those programs were canceled after the revolution of the 60s, and America became the worse for it. Road rage, loud cell phone conversations in restaurants, cutting in line, throwing litter from car windows, and general nastiness are now every day occurrences.

Monica Brandner teaches at an etiquette business for children and youth called Final Touch Finishing School. She says that manners are primarily about how we treat others and ourselves. Sheryl Eberly, who wrote *365 Manners Kids Should Know*, agrees. She says living by the golden rule releases the power of a thankful heart to those trained to practice it. She also reminds us, and this is a great point, that when we teach social graces to our children, we're training the next generation in self-government and self-control. John Adams must be smiling from the other side. In short, teaching manners to girls is about helping them to become young ladies in a not very civil world. I assure you that MTV and an increasingly crude culture will do everything possible to carry our daughters and our sons downstream toward that which is boorish and uncouth. You can help them paddle upstream.

One technique that my wife used to teach social graces to our daughter was to play feminine games together. For example, they held elaborate tea parties

when Danae was four or five years of age. The child loved them. Their make-believe names were Mrs. Perry, that was Danae, Mrs. Snail, her mom, and a little boy named Mr. Green, who was drafted into service. Other available kids and their moms from the neighborhood were invited on occasion. This fun activity allowed my wife to explain how silverware was supposed to be arranged, how to eat soup without slurping, how to hold and drink from a teacup, how to use a napkin, how to chew with mouths closed, how to hold a conversation, why they should wait to eat until everyone at the table was served, et cetera. It's amazing how effective these tea parties were in teaching common politeness.

I was never invited to join them and I definitely felt left out, but what about moms who haven't been trained in social etiquette themselves? They can hardly pass on what they haven't learned. What can we suggest for those who are simply too busy to tackle the job? That's where professional etiquette training comes in. Classes are popping up in cities across the country to meet this precise need. Though these training programs can be expensive, they are worth the cost for parents who can afford them. For those who don't have the resources, some churches and women's clubs are providing assistance. Furthermore, we should never forget what some grandmothers have to offer in teaching these concepts. They are likely to remember a more genteel era and their granddaughters will enjoy the attention that comes with the training.

Another source of assistance for moms and dads is the array of materials and manuals now available. I have mentioned several of them, which appear at the end of this book. Some would question whether it's even desirable for a girl to be feminine in a traditional sense, fearing that it will signal a return to the oppression of a patriarchal era when women had to hide their intelligence and conceal their accomplishments. Hear me out, moms. Not for a moment would I try to take away the hard won achievement of respect and emancipation enjoyed by today's women. Those cultural advances are here to stay, and may they long endure. On the contrary, I would point out that femaleness and weakness are not synonymous. Femininity and strength of character are often very close neighbors. I come from a family of strong women who knew who they were and where God was leading them. They took a backseat to no one. My grandmother co-pastored a thriving church with my grandfather. She could preach up a storm. I can't imagine anyone telling her to sit down, fold her arms and keep her mouth shut.

One of her daughters became my mother, who was also a very confident and accomplished lady. Yet, my mother and her sisters were undeniably feminine. My mom and dad loved each other deeply and they had a very healthy relationship based on their identities as a woman and a man. He was very respectful, protective and supportive of her. I never saw him treat her rudely or harshly. After I was grown, I remember getting upset at my mom for something that she said that irritated me. I made the mistake of telling my dad about it. I'll never forget him turning those steely blue eyes on me and saying angrily, "Listen bud, your mother's the best friend you have and I won't stand for you

saying anything disrespectful about her." It was the end of the conversation. When dad called me 'bud,' I knew it was time to back off.

On the other side of the ledger, my mom honored my dad not just as her husband, but also as a man. She would not have thought of failing to have a meal waiting for him when he came home. Being from the South, she was not offended when he called from his big chair where he was reading a book. He would say, "Hey, Myrt, bring me a cup of coffee, please." He was her man and she took care of him. It was a relationship based on mutual respect and it was highly successful. They both understood manners and morals and their relationship to spirituality, masculinity and femininity. My parents modeled them consistently throughout my childhood.

I displayed that training on my first date with a cute coed named Shirley. I took her to a classy restaurant in Hollywood, California, where I told the host where we wanted to sit. Then I helped Shirley with their chair. I asked what she wanted to eat, and I conveyed her order to the waiter. We engaged each other in conversation for more than an hour, mostly about Shirley. Then I paid the check and I took her to my car. I walked on the outside of the sidewalk nearest the street, which was and still should be symbolic of a guy's responsibility to protect the woman in his care. I opened the car door for her and we drove back to our college. I parked, came around to her side of the car, opened the door, and walked Shirley to the front door of her dorm. She thanked me with a smile and we said good night. I didn't try to kiss her since that would have put her in a compromising position on a first date, as though she owed me something as a payback.

I still try to show her the same courtesies and respect that helped me win her heart in the first place, and she knows all the ways to please me. So much has changed in the culture since then. I will tell you that I'm disgusted by the way young men treat their girlfriends today. Some guys will honk from the street waiting for a girl to come out. They stay behind the steering wheel while she opens her own door and then they take her to a McDonald's or a Taco Bell. Often the guy will even expect his date to pay for her own food and they both contribute to the tip. Do you know why this happens? Because girls tolerate it. I would advise a young lady who is expected to pay for her meal to do so only once. She should then ask to be taken straight home and never agree to see the dude again. Any man who is that disrespectful doesn't deserve a second chance.

Women hold the keys to masculine behavior. Guys are inclined to take what they can get and be no more accommodating than they have to be. To some degree, the lack of culture and refinement that we see in many of today's men is the fault of women who ask for and get little or nothing. If a girl sees herself as a lady, she will expect her escort to behave like a gentleman. He will respect her if she respects herself. If she wants him to be spiritually sensitive, she should go out with him only if he accompanies her to church. If she objects to his use of profanity, she should simply not accept it. If she wants him to think of her often and call her on the phone, she should wait for him to get the idea himself.

Female aggressiveness is a turnoff to most men. I don't care if the rules have changed. It's still a bad idea for a girl to pursue a guy breathlessly. She should let him be the initiator. That's the way he is made.

Parents, teach these concepts to your girls. If your daughter wants her boyfriend to take her to nice places, she should expect him to make the plans for an evening together, and to ask her out at least a week ahead of time. If he shows up unannounced on Friday night and says, "Want to hang out?", she should tell him she has other things to do. If she wants him to be a gentleman, then she should require him to act like one. She should always remember that she is a lady.

If a woman wants a man to marry her, she must not make herself available sexually. That wrecks a relationship. Besides, it's morally wrong. Under no circumstances should she live with a guy before marriage. She will probably wind up getting hurt and living to regret it. He will get what he wants and she will get nothing. The number one reason men give for marrying late or not at all is because they can get everything they want, including love and sex, without commitment. A moral, self-respecting woman simply will not play that game. If it becomes obvious that a guy is not going to commit, she should send him packing, period. Don't argue with the jerk about it. Just cut him loose. Don't blame a guy if he's unmannerly and exploitative. Show him what you expect, and if he balks, move on, quickly. If he's a big drinker and uses illicit drugs, run from him. He's trouble on the hoof. Don't give him a beachhead in your heart. There is someone better out there for you if you set your standards high.

It comes down to this, the relationship between a man and a woman, throughout their lives together, if indeed they do marry, will reflect the ground rules set by the woman when they're courting. She can change him then, but probably not after. She should not settle for anything less than what she needs emotionally. High on her list of priorities should be a mutual understanding about manners and morals. It's the way men and women have related to each other for thousands of years, and it still provides a basis for healthy families that are equipped to go the distance.

However, teaching girls to be ladies is not enough. We must also give them a strong biblical foundation from which morals and virtue can evolve. Our hope is that our daughters will someday pass along those verities to the next generation. No other priority comes close to this one in significance. For now, it seems appropriate to return to the words of President John Adams, who gave this solemn charge to the nation's women. You'll recall that he said, "The foundations of national morality must be laid in private families. The mothers are the earliest and most important instructors of youth." It was true in 1798, and it's still true today.

Roger Marsh:

Well, what an enlightening program featuring the timeless wisdom of our very own Dr. James Dobson, here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and I hope his words spoke directly to you, especially young women who are listening today.

You don't have to go along with this perverse culture that surrounds you each and every day. In fact, the moral fabric of our society really depends on your decision to adhere to godliness and civility. You must accept this responsibility not only for your own dignity, but for the education of future generations.

Now, if you'd like information on getting your own copy of *Bringing Up Girls*, visit our broadcast page at DrJamesDobson.org. Once you're there, you'll see the links to request either the paperback or audio book version of this classic work. You'll find those resources and much more when you visit DrJamesDobson.org, and then go to today's broadcast page. Well, that brings us to the end of this radio program. And thank you for joining us today, and we are so grateful for the various ways that you support this ministry. I hope you make time to listen to us once again for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Have a blessed day.

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

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hi everyone. This is Dr. Tim Clinton, Executive Director of the James Dobson Family Institute. I wanted to quickly tell you about a matching gift we received from a generous friend of our ministry. What that means right now is that every donation you make to the ministry will be doubled. See how you can contribute to this grant by visiting us at DrJamesDobson.org. That's DrJamesDobson.org, or call us toll free right now, toll free, (877) 732-6825, that number again, toll free, (877) 732-6825. The match won't last long. Step in now, would you, and become a friend of this ministry.