



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Delicate Mother-In-Law Relationship – Part 2

Guest(s): Annie Chapman

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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, everyone, to Family Talk, a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. And in just a moment, we'll be concluding a two-day presentation about the delicate relationship with one's in-laws. All too often couples forget that they are not only marrying their spouse, but they're actually marrying their spouse's entire family the moment that they say, "I do." And one of the trickiest relationships to navigate is the unique dynamic between a mother and her new daughter-in-law. I'm joined once again by our host, Dr. James Dobson, as he introduces today's program. Doctor?

Dr. James Dobson: Yesterday we aired the first part of a conversation that I had with singer and author, Mrs. Annie Chapman. Annie is one half of a wonderful singing duo with her husband, Steve Chapman. Very good friends of ours. And she has courageously tackled this issue of in-laws in her book, *The Mother-In-Law Dance*. And she asks this very important question. Can two women love the same man and still get along? And at the end of our program last time she answered that question by saying, "Yes. They can, barely, but only if they both work hard at it." And that summarizes yesterday's program.

Roger Marsh: Boy, that's right, Doctor. I'm sure our listeners would like to know, so I can ask. Did you and your wife, Shirley, have to actually work through some of those same issues that we're describing here?

Dr. James Dobson: We did, Roger. Shirley and I have had an absolutely wonderful relationship. There just hadn't been a lot of conflict. There were some difficult moments in the early years of our marriage between Shirley and my mother. We fell into some of the same conflict and traps that Annie Chapman was talking about, which is why I really wanted to air this program again for the benefit of those who are planning a wedding or those who are already married and are struggling with this matter of the mother-in-law dance. My wife and my mother, after about four or five years, really bonded together. And by the time we moved on through the years and my mom and dad both died, Shirley grieved as much as I did over them. But we had to work at it. And that's really what Annie

is talking about. If you really want to make it go, you've got to put your shoulder to the plow because it is made for conflict.

Roger Marsh: Doctor, there's a study from Cambridge University, I think it was a few years ago, that actually showed that about 60% of women have some serious trouble with their female in-laws and that percentage was about the same for mother-in-laws, as well as daughter-in-laws.

Dr. James Dobson: Sometimes that conflict can actually undermine the strength of the marriage. And that's why I hope this program today will be helpful to people who find themselves in that difficult situation.

Roger Marsh: Indeed. Well, before we get to the program, let me quickly introduce Annie Chapman. Doctor, you mentioned earlier that she's a singer. She's a songwriter. She's also an author and has written several books on marriage and family issues. Additionally, she's a wife and a mother and a mother-in-law. And today she speaks very candidly about those roles as she explains her reasons for pursuing this particular parenting topic. So let's jump into your conversation now, Doctor, with her on Family Talk.

Annie Chapman: I just would say to a mother-in-law or daughter-in-law that maybe is in a difficult situation that they would look to Jesus to be their help. There's only one place in the scripture where Jesus describes Himself and that's in Matthew 11. And He says, "Come in to me all you labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." Now, this is when Jesus tells us what He's like. "I am gentle and humble in spirit. And I will give rest to your soul for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." In this world, we will all wear a yoke and we will all carry a burden, but the choice is it Jesus burden and is it His yoke, which is easy and pleasant, or ours, which is pretty hard to handle? And so I would just say if we... As a Christian, I say I want to be like Jesus. Well, there's the formula right there, to be gentle and humble in spirit. And I think you can get along with your in-laws better if you take that approach.

Dr. James Dobson: And if you deal that kind of gentleness and compassion to another person, you're likely to get it back. You said, Annie, last time that sometimes the things that go into being a great mother go into creating some problems as a mother-in-law.

Annie Chapman: Yeah. The mother-in-law dance. It's tough. And I say to the mother, shame on any mother who makes her son have to scold him and shame on any son who does not take his wife's side, because it's just... You have to have those boundaries set. You have to have that. Heidi was a part of a Bible study with girls that had been married a year, two years, five years. It was about the max. And so when I was doing the research for this book, I had sent some of these surveys to these young girls. So of the girls said to Heidi, said, "Ask your mom to answer this question. 'My mother doesn't have a hard time with me being married and letting go of me, but she has a horrible time letting go of my

brother. What is the difference between the mother's relationship with the daughter and the son?" So I told Heidi, I said, "Tell her this. Mothers never let go of their daughters. That's what-

Dr. James Dobson: They don't have to.

Annie Chapman: They don't have to. That's why there's not that rub. I mean, I talk to Heidi every day and I don't call in the evenings. There's some boundaries that I have set up because she's got her family to tend to, but with Nathan, the mother has to let go of the son and that becomes the rub, because she really... If it's going to be done right, she doesn't have a choice. She has to let go.

The story that really motivated me to start even pursuing this subject was I've talked to a friend who said that she and her husband went to see their son and his wife and they'd driven a long distance and they were so excited about getting to see this little family. Well, she found out the next day that the daughter-in-law was going to go to a mother-daughter banquet. And since the daughter-in-law's mother lived several states away, she assumed that she would be the one who would be asked to accompany her to that. She said the next day she waited and waited for that daughter-in-law to say, "I want you to go with me," and the girl got ready and left. And the father had to explain to his son why the mother had locked herself in the bedroom and was crying uncontrollably.

So the one thing the mother-in-law said to me, my friend said, "I never want to go back to that house again. Ever." And it was so sad. And I thought a thoughtless act. The girl, I don't know if she's just rude or thoughtless or not, ill-mannered or what. What years and years of trouble will be brewed from that one thoughtless act.

Dr. James Dobson: It is possible that it never occurred to the girl.

Annie Chapman: It's poss... And the son would not confront the young girl and say, "Ask my mom to go with you." That's all he would've had to have said.

Dr. James Dobson: When you were in my office, you used a phrase that I thought was really powerful. You said that most of the conflict does not result from knockdown drag-outs where you're screaming at each other. It results from chin quivering events where you're just wounded. You're just hurt.

Annie Chapman: Yeah. That's what I call it, chin quivering time. And that's when your feelings are hurt. It's easier to get over anger, I think, than those deep, deep hurts. But another thing we were talking about was the son's responsibility. The daughter-in-law really should not confront the mother-in-law. It's the place of the son because the mother will forgive her son, but she won't forgive that girl. And the confrontation is different with the son and the mother because she might get hurt when the son tells her to do... Like a situation like that. She'll just get mad at the girl. One of the chapters in the book is entitled "Boxer's Dance Too," and

that's getting along with someone that just doesn't want to cooperate. And one daughter-in-law told the saddest story, and she told about her mother-in-law who was an alcoholic. And when she'd come to see, they didn't know who was going to show up, it's according to how much she'd been drinking and how mean and hateful. She introduced this daughter-in-law to her friends as, "This is my fat daughter-in-law."

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, my goodness.

Annie Chapman: Now that goes over big. But she went on to... I said, "Did your husband run interference for you? Did he try to fix this?" And she said, "The mother was so mean to him, I didn't want to put him in the line of fire. And I figured if she's not going to be nice to her own son, what's she going to do to me?" And so she learned to deal.

Dr. James Dobson: She had intimidated both of them.

Annie Chapman: She did. But that mother-in-law went out on a cold day to let the cat in and slipped and fell and died. And they went into that house. This is a woman who lives alone expecting to go right back in. So this is how she really lived. When they went into that house, they found post-it notes, little post-ems. One by the bathroom mirror that said, "Pray for..." and one of the grandchildren. A post-em over the sink, "Pray for this family member." All over that house, there were little post-it notes of people she prayed for. They didn't have a clue that she really felt this way. This was a wounded, sick woman who found it easier to build walls than bridges.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, my. Boy, that sets it off.

Annie Chapman: And they found out who she was. And this daughter-in-law said, "I am so glad that I bit my tongue. I am so grateful for the times that I didn't snap back and I didn't call her names and I didn't cut us off. At her funeral, I had no regrets."

Dr. James Dobson: Boy, that is a very moving story. Annie, I'm not sure if this principle is in your book, but it ought to be, maybe in your next one.

Annie Chapman: There you go.

Dr. James Dobson: But there will come a time when that young couple will be hurt with each other. And sometimes one of them will come to you as a mother-in-law and spout off about what this guy has done and all the ways that he hurts her and all the ways that he's not there for her. And she had better not take the bait because if she jumps in there and says, "I've noticed that too. I don't understand why he is like that," and she criticizes him, they're likely to patch this up and guess what she's going to tell him? She's going to tell him what you said. And then you got a new problem on your hands.

Annie Chapman: Yeah. You've got extra problems.

Dr. James Dobson: So you sympathize and empathize and pray with and care for and help her talk, but you don't get in the middle of that fight.

Roger Marsh: I'm Roger Marsh. Just jumping in here for a brief moment to remind you that you're listening to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Now on behalf of Dr. Dobson and all of us here at the JDFI, I want to thank you for listening today. By the way, your continued generosity and your prayers and faithful financial support help keep us on the air. We would not be able to bring programs to you like the one you're listening to right now without your generous financial support. To learn how you can stand with us financially, you can visit drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org. And now let's rejoin Dr. Dobson and his guest, Annie Chapman, as they continue their conversation on the delicate mother-in-law relationship right now on Family Talk.

Annie Chapman: And I'd say to a daughter-in-law, "If you have a complaint against your husband, tell your girlfriend. Don't tell your mother-in-law." No mother wants to hear their son criticized. No mother wants to hear their son's faults pointed out. And that is wrong to put the mother in that position.

Dr. James Dobson: Except to support her. And you can do that in a very loving way. And you can pour oil on troubled waters. You can say, "You know what? Every young couple goes through this and that's what you're going through. And it may not even be a bad thing. It's a way of ventilating and a way of learning, and you grow through it. And I'm going to pray the Lord's going to help you do it." And you haven't done any damage, but you just have to be aware that there are boundaries there.

Annie Chapman: There are boundaries.

Dr. James Dobson: And in fact, Annie, you make that point very, very well in your book that you must never behave as a mother-in-law in any way that will weaken the bond between that young man and woman, even if it means you let them go completely. Even if they don't call you for a year. Even if they don't come Thanksgiving or Christmas or any other time. If your reacting to that is going to set them against each other, you lose.

Annie Chapman: That's right. If I ever thought I was going to do something that would undermine my son's relationship with his wife and would cause a rift between, I would walk away. I would rather-

Dr. James Dobson: Would you do that?

Annie Chapman: I would. I would walk away in a heartbeat, because for one thing, I honor the marriage relationship that much. I mean, it's the picture of how much God loves

us. And it is not to be undermined even by a well-intended mother or mother-in-law. I talked to one daughter-in-law who lived next door to her mother-in-law. And she said it was not fair to either one of them, the mother or the daughter, because the only thing that had changed in her life was instead of her son living in the next bedroom, he just lived in the next house. And there had never been that severing and that autonomy of relationship. And the daughter-in-law said, "There's nothing quite so unattractive as a jealous mother and an insecure wife." And that was the dynamic.

Dr. James Dobson: Annie, we have bounced along now through the first program, and we're three-quarters of the way through the second. And I've been meaning all the way through to ask you about the research that you did in preparation for writing *The Mother-in-Law Dance*. You didn't just sit down and start writing. You sing all over the country all the time. Sometimes it seems like, I'm sure, 30 days a month that you guys are out there. And you talk to a lot of women. And so you began asking them about this. What did you find?

Annie Chapman: Well, for two and a half years, before I ever started to write it, I had questionnaires everywhere I went and I had them specifically for mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. And I found that this very thing that it was either good or bad, and these women were very quick to answer these questions. I think they wanted to talk about it. And some of the feelings were so sad. One of the question was, "What's the meanest thing your mother-in-law ever did to you?" And then I did, "What's the meanest thing your daughter-in-law?" to make it even. How quickly those answers came. And one woman, when she answered that, she goes, "30 years ago," I mean, it was like on the tip of her tongue, "On my wedding day, my sister overheard my mother-in-law say that I looked fat in my wedding dress." Okay.

Dr. James Dobson: That's not a smart lady.

Annie Chapman: This is a female thing. If that happened with men, they just go out in the yard and duke it out and get it over with. No, women have got to carry this grudge for 30 years. It's just so female. And I found that over and over. But the good news is that people say, "Well, can mother-in-law and daughter-in-law really get along?" There's not many examples in the Bible about that relationship.

Dr. James Dobson: There's one.

Annie Chapman: But there's a doozy.

Dr. James Dobson: It sure is.

Annie Chapman: And it's Naomi and Ruth and the most beautiful declaration of love ever given was given between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Steve and I had that read at our wedding as between husbands and wives. "Your God will be my God.

Where you die, I want to be buried. Don't leave me." This beautiful declaration of love.

Dr. James Dobson: "Your people will be my people."

Annie Chapman: And isn't that true? And some people say, "Well, maybe it was easy because they had things in common." But when you look at their lives, it's a Jewish woman, her son marrying a pagan woman, different social classes, different races, different religions, and yet somehow those two women were able to let love be the bridge between them. Even when the son was dead, there was no need for them to be connected, they still let love between them be a bridge that then Ruth became a part of the lineage of Christ.

Dr. James Dobson: The grandmother of David.

Annie Chapman: Oh, beautiful. Beautiful. That should give everyone hope. No matter how, what you have to overcome with your relationship with your mother-in-law, that should be the thing that gives us hope.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's turn to the Scripture in closing here today because the Bible has a lot to say about these relationships. Proverbs 14:1 says, "The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands, the foolish one tears hers down." That's what happens when you get all this anger and conflict within a marriage. And of course, Ruth 1:16 and 17, Annie, which you quoted. Colossians 3:8 and 9, "But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these, anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices." Colossians 3:12 and 14, "Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." If we just do that, we would not have these problems within the family.

Annie Chapman: And there's one more in Romans 12, it says, "As much as is up to you, live at peace with all men." I said, even God knows there's some people you can't be at peace with, but as much as is possible. And there's some people we're talking to that their lives are miserable and they've tried and tried and tried and just know, God sees what you're really conflicted with and what you're confronted with.

Dr. James Dobson: There's one more Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy." Show a little mercy...

Annie Chapman: There you go. There you go.

Dr. James Dobson: To the one that's also struggling trying to adjust to this new relationship.

Annie Chapman: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: Annie, this is good stuff.

Annie Chapman: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: We call this nuts and bolts. And this is practical information that can be used in almost every family. I know of no families that don't have some of this kind of tension and conflict. It's human nature. We're pugnacious people and we have difficulty adjusting to the quirks and whims of those closest to us. But you've offered some wonderful advice here. The name of the book is *The Mother-In-Law Dance: Can Two Women Love the Same Man and Still Get Along?* And I appreciate you writing this book and being with us again.

Annie Chapman: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: Give Steve our love, will you?

Annie Chapman: I will. I will.

Dr. James Dobson: And come back and sing for us next time, will you?

Annie Chapman: Okay. It's a deal.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, what a great conversation we had with Annie Chapman on these two days from a previous broadcast here on Family Talk. Annie Chapman, to remind you, is married to Steve Chapman and they are wonderful musicians and they sing as a family all over the country. And I really do love and appreciate these people.

Roger Marsh: Indeed, Doctor. They certainly are a wonderful God-led couple. And we heard Annie mention earlier that over a period of about two and a half years, she collected stories from women describing their own mother-in-law and daughter-in-law experiences. And these stories highlight all of the ups and downs that women have experienced with the wife versus mother-in-law dynamic in the home. Now, these are all included in her new book called *The Mother-In-Law Dance*, along with her insightful advice as how to navigate that relationship as well. To learn more about how you can receive a copy of this book, just visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And remember, you can also access that information via the Family Talk app as well.

I want to shed some light on the ever important relationship, not only between mothers and their daughters-in-law, but a father and his son. We know that Dad is incredibly crucial in the lives of both of his sons and daughters, but especially to his sons. A God-led father offers support, education for life and about how to follow God. A God-led father gives kids encouragement.

And if you are seeking to develop or strengthen your relationship with your son, we have just the resource for you. It's a brand new devotional created by Mark Hancock, who's the CEO of Trail Life USA, an outstanding scouting group for boys. The book is called *Trail Ready: 101 Devotions for Dads with Boys*. And to get your copy of this devotional, simply visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and then click the link at the bottom of today's broadcast page. We'll be happy to send it to you as our thank you for your donation of any amount in support of the JDFI today. Again, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk, or you can make your request over the phone when you call 877-732-6825. We truly hope this devotional book will a deeper and more meaningful relationship between you and your son. Again, the number to call is 877-732-6825.

Well, that's all the time we have for today and for this broadcast week here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Hope you join us again on Monday for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust, for the family you love. Have a blessed and peaceful weekend.

- Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.
- Dr. James Dobson: Sometimes reenacting the first stages of a dating relationship can help rekindle the fires in a marriage.
- Roger Marsh: With today's Dr. Dobson minute, here's Dr. James Dobson.
- Dr. James Dobson: According to Dr. Desmond Morris and Dr. Donald Joy, there are 12 stages to marital bonding that cement us together as a husband and wife. They progress from the least intimate to the most intimate, from simple eye contact to sexual fulfillment itself. Unfortunately, many of us neglect the early stages that drew us together in the beginning. What can we do when our relationship lacks romance? Dr. Joy suggests going back to the basics, the early bonding stages of dating, eye contact, touch, holding hands, giving unexpected hugs. These are the experiences that convey a sentiment that words can't express.
- Roger Marsh: For more information, visit drdobsonminute.org.

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