



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Toxic War on Masculinity – Part 2

Guest(s): Nancy Pearcey

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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: The following program is intended for mature audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and today we're going to hear part two of a conversation that I had with our special guest, Nancy Pearcey. I'd like to note that this program was recorded on location at this year's National Religious Broadcasters Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. So you may hear some of the excitement of fellow broadcasters going on in the background. Nancy Pearcey is a professor and scholar in residence at Houston Christian University where she holds the Elizabeth and John Gibson Endowed Chair in Apologetics. Nancy has published over 100 articles during her career and is the best-selling author of several books. So let's get to this special conversation right now and hear my discussion with author Nancy Pearcey right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Well, Nancy, welcome back to Family Talk. We had such a great conversation yesterday diving into your book, *The Toxic War on Masculinity*, and I'm looking forward to getting into more of it even today. On yesterday's program, we left off where men were dangling, hanging out over the cliff here, were falling behind, lower life expectancies, making it now more difficult. The ripple effect is that younger women and marrying age women are having a harder time finding someone who's compatible. It really has gotten to the point where the war on masculinity has become toxic, and there's no doubt. I don't want to go any further without saying, you and I would both agree that there is such a thing as toxic masculinity and it's not good for anyone. Abusive, oppressive masculine behaviors are not good. The problem we're seeing in the culture though is that oftentimes masculinity is painted with that brush, where all masculinity is seen as toxic masculinity. Is that a fair assessment?

Nancy Pearcey: Yeah, yeah. What I argue in my book is that secularism has in fact produced a more toxic version of masculinity. For example, I traced several stages of that

development historically, and one of the key stages was the rise of Darwinian evolution. And that's a bit of a surprise because most of us think that's evolution, that's about science. But in fact, Darwinism had a huge impact on social understandings of masculinity. Darwinian writers began to say the men who won out on top in the struggle for survival were ruthless, brutal, savage, barbarian and predatory, and that these were the men that succeeded and became our ancestors. So those are the traits that was selected for by natural selection. Today, it's no longer called social darwinism, it's called evolutionary psychology, but they're still saying that. There was a best-selling book called *The Moral Animal*, and the author said, the human male, direct quote, "the human male is an oppressive, possessive, flesh obsessed pig." And then he added, "giving men a book on how to have a better marriage, is like giving a booklet to Vikings on how not to pillage."

Roger Marsh: Were there any citations in this book? I'm just curious. Any research?

Nancy Pearcey: It was a best-selling book.

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Nancy Pearcey: And you can go look at it on Amazon, *The Moral Animal*. And then there was another book, an older one that was just reissued called *Men in Marriage*, and it agrees. It says that the male nature is violent, addiction prone, irresponsible and sexually predatory. And he says the intrinsic male nature, their deepest longing is not for wife and family. Their deepest longing is for the male escape, the open road. Wait, let me give you exact words. "The escape to a predatory and immediate gratification."

And I'm like, wait a minute, this sounds worse than any feminist. And these are male authors, but they're speaking from the position of evolutionary psychology. And so when people say, hasn't the concept of masculinity turned toxic? I said, yes, it's the secular view of masculinity that has in fact turned toxic and is telling people, well, it's the source of the Andrew Tate phenomenon. Fast money, fast cars, fast women. That's the paradigm of the secular view.

Roger Marsh: It's interesting when you read up on the studies that you've done, and of course *The Toxic War on Masculinity* is such an amazing book for that regard. One of the things you talk about in the book, Nancy, is the fact that there are really two competing scripts in a man's life. One of them is the good man and one of them is the real man. And if you look in the media, I don't know which one wins, which one is the one that's champion. Talk about, well, first of all, what are the differences in the scripts and why do they cause so much confusion for guys?

Nancy Pearcey: Yeah. So this was a product of a study by a sociologist and he's well-known, so that he gets invited to speak all around the world, and he came up with this clever experiment where he would ask young men, well, two questions. First one was, what does it mean to be a good man? You had a funeral and in the

eulogy somebody says he was a good man. What does that mean? And the sociologist said, all around the world, young men had no trouble answering that. They would immediately start listing duty, honor, integrity, sacrifice, do the right thing, look out for the little guy, be a provider, be a protector, be responsible. And the sociologist said, well, where'd you learn that? They said, I don't know, it's just in the air we breathe. Or as you and I would say, they are made in God's image. They do have an innate inherent intrinsic knowledge.

Roger Marsh: It's written on the heart.

Nancy Pearcey: And this was global. By the way, if they were coming from a western country, they would often say it's part of a Judeo-Christian heritage.

Roger Marsh: Interesting.

Nancy Pearcey: But then he would follow up with the second question, and that was, what does it mean if I say to you, man up, be a real man? And the young men themselves would say, oh, no, no, that's completely different. That means be tough, never show weakness, win at all costs, suck it up, play through pain, be competitive, get rich, get laid. I'm using their language. And so the sociologist, he's not a Christian, but he himself concluded that young men feel this pressure of being trapped between two competing scripts, that they innately know what it means to be a good man. Or we might say Romans two, we all have a conscience. We all do know, but they're feeling cultural pressure to be the "real man," which is very different traits.

Not all of them are bad. We want people to stand tough in a crisis, but if decoupled, if disconnected from the real man, the moral ideal, then it can slide into those toxic traits of entitlement, control, dominance, and so on. And so knowing this gives us a much more effective way of dealing with this issues, because most men don't respond well to being called toxic.

Roger Marsh: Right.

Nancy Pearcey: Nobody would.

Roger Marsh: It's an inflammatory term. So let's look at the solutions then, because obviously as people of faith, we're looking at this toxic war on masculinity and saying, wait, not all masculinity is toxic. There is toxic masculinity. We've got a cognitive dissonance. We can hold those two seemingly opposing views in one in each hand. But moving forward, we realize there's a problem in the culture because to your point, young men know what a good man is. They just don't always act on those impulses because they're confused by the real man. The Bible speaks into this, and now we're not going to come in and just say, and the Bible tells me, so here are three verses and all masculinity problems will be gone. But while you were doing researching for the book, did you come across anything

that might've been a surprise? Like, oh, I didn't think that part of scripture actually applied to healthy masculinity as opposed to toxic.

Nancy Pearcey: Oh yeah, I was totally surprised. So I'm working on the problem, which is the toxic definition of masculinity, and I stumbled across the answer. And that is that there have been sociological studies showing that Christian men who attend church regularly actually test out as the best husbands and fathers. And this is totally contrary to the media narrative, which is that they're exhibit A of toxic masculinity. I'll give you just one example. It was easy to find them. But the co-founder of the ChurchToo movement, which followed the Me Too movement, said the theology of male headship feeds the rape culture that we see permeating American Christianity today.

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Nancy Pearcey: So the sociologists, psychologists were listening to this and saying, but where's your evidence? You're making these charges, but where's your data? So they went out and did the studies, and I quote some dozen of those studies in my book where they discovered that Christian men who attend church regularly test out as the most loving, engaged husbands and fathers. Their wives are tested as well separately, which is important. And they test out as saying that they're the happiest with the way their husbands treat them. Evangelical men spend more time with their children than any other group, 3.5 hours more per week than secular men.

Roger Marsh: Really?

Nancy Pearcey: They have the lowest rate of divorce, 35% lower than secular men.

Roger Marsh: Interesting.

Nancy Pearcey: And they actually have the lowest rate of domestic abuse and violence of any major group in America. And sometimes they "can crystallize it." So let me give you one. The person who did the largest study was Brad Wilcox, who teaches at the University of Virginia, he's a sociologist. And to give you some sense of a stature, he gets invited to publish in places like the *New York Times*.

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Nancy Pearcey: So this is an article that he published in the *New York Times*, and he said, this is a direct quote. "It turns out that the happiest of all wives in America are religious conservatives." They focus on the wives because the assumption is that these marriages are oppressive to the wives. But no, the happiest of all wives in America are religious conservatives, fully 73% of women who hold conservative gender values and attend church regularly with their husbands have high-quality marriages.

Roger Marsh: Interesting.

Nancy Pearcey: And then he turns to his secular colleagues, I like this part of it. And he says, "academics need to cast aside their prejudices against religious conservatives, and Evangelicals in particular."

Roger Marsh: Interesting.

Nancy Pearcey: Evangelical protestant, married men with children are consistently the most loving and engaged husbands and fathers. So this is not a pep talk from a religious leader. This is solid empirical data that we should be confident about bringing both into the public square, and I think also into our churches to help encourage Christian men. The first pushback I always get is, but haven't we all heard that Christians divorce at the same rate as the rest of-

Roger Marsh: ... a lot. Yeah.

Nancy Pearcey: ... Western culture. In fact, what I found out is that it is one of the most widely cited statistics by Christian leaders. So again, the researchers went back to the data and they separated out Christian men who are actually committed, authentic, attend church regularly from nominal Christians. And in America, we have a lot of those.

Roger Marsh: Yes, we do.

Nancy Pearcey: My students don't know what nominal means though. I actually have to tell them. N-O-M is Latin for name. So in name only. So these men who on a survey like this might check the Baptist box for example, but who attend church rarely, if at all. It is more of a cultural family background. And they test out shockingly different. They fit all the toxic stereotypes. Their wives report the lowest level of happiness. They spend less time with their children.

Roger Marsh: Even more than secular people who don't have any religious background.

Nancy Pearcey: Yeah. So they have a higher rate of divorce, even higher than secular couples.

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Nancy Pearcey: 20% higher than secular couples. And they have the highest rate of domestic abuse and violence of any group in America, higher than secular men.

Roger Marsh: So if I can paint a picture here, top of the heap is Christian men actively engaged in their faith, wives have the happiest level of happiness. Second is people with no faith, and they're getting by. That the bottom of the heap is the nominal Christian who says, I'm a professing Christian, but I'm not really living out my faith. And that's where the divorce, the domestic abuse, the distancing from children, that's all happening. That's graphic.

Nancy Pearcey: Isn't it? Yeah. So basically these are the men who are at the fringes of the Christian Church, but they're taking words like headship and submission and infusing those terms with meanings from the secular culture, and then they end up being worse. Some people ask me, why would they actually be worse than secular men? Well, a secular guy who's maybe hitting his wife and kids feels no religious justification. The nominal Christian will say, oh, I'm justified in doing this because the Bible says I'm the head of the household. She wouldn't submit, so I had to put her in her place. They end up having the worst of both worlds, because they're taking religious justification for the mistreatment of their family.

Roger Marsh: Dr. Dobson has been such a huge champion for the family, of course, over the years and especially the importance of dads. He talks about his relationship with his dad. I know you write about your relationship with your dad. Before I ask you a question about doctor, I want to talk about the part where you write about in the book, about your relationship with your dad and how it was a 50/50 ball because there was public dad and then there was private dad. Talk about how that impacted you. I'm sure that some of those scenes played out when you were a child, were still coming back to you as you were doing the research for this book.

Nancy Pearcey: Yes. My father was severely physically abusive. And he would punch us and kick us. And his favorite was the knuckle fist with the middle knuckle slightly extended to have a sharper stab of-

Roger Marsh: I'm so sorry.

Nancy Pearcey: ... pain. And so as you can imagine, when I became a teenager, I went whole hog feminist. I was a complete feminist for many years. I read all the groundbreaking books. I wanted Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Susan Brown Miller. I read them all. I always had some feminist book on my bedside table.

Roger Marsh: Interesting. To ward off dad or just?

Nancy Pearcey: I'm sure it is, because I thought men were basically evil from my background. I was very angry. I was full of anger.

Roger Marsh: Sure.

Nancy Pearcey: And then I became a Christian. I had to start rethinking the whole thing. And it did take many years of emotional, psychological, spiritual healing. So what I say in my book is in the sense I've been writing this book my whole life, because it was severe enough that it's something that takes you a whole life to really come through. And I had an interview with a Christian psychologist who said, "Well, at least we know you're not writing from an ivory tower. You're writing from the trenches."

Roger Marsh: Oh, school of hard knocks. It's tough, and yet the point earlier about Dr. being such a huge champion for the positive role, and I'm sure that men like him have come along and helped a lot of families, situations like yours to say, Hey, look, I know you may have grown up in an abusive home, but when dad has it right, when God is really speaking into his life and working in and through him, that this war on masculinity now is affecting even those good dads. And you're here to say, Hey, wait a minute. I know what an abusive dad looks like. I know what a good godly dad looks like. And we need the good godly dad now more than ever.

Nancy Pearcey: Yeah, it is good that I could say, I'm not speaking from having had a warm, loving, secure home so that it would be easy for me to say, of course men are good because the men in my life had been good. No, I had to work through from the ground up. Let's take something as simple as at the beginning of the book. I say, let's talk about the creational givens. Men are just bigger, stronger, faster, and because of testosterone, they're more aggressive and more risk taking. And we have to say, these are good. I couldn't say that when I first started writing the book. I still couldn't say it. So the book was really an important process for me as well, for me to be able to say, look, the way God created men is good because anything God creates is good.

Roger Marsh: Is good yeah.

Nancy Pearcey: And so that's the first message that we have to get out there against the very concept of toxic masculinity is that what God has created is good, and God has created masculinity.

Roger Marsh: Amen. When men are operating in God's plan for masculinity, it makes it so much easier for women to be women. You're going to see a lot less confusion. There's a woman who's listening to us right now who says, yeah, but Nancy, you don't understand. My husband is Joe Christian at church and at home, I don't know who I'm dealing with. Talk to her and encourage her about why there is a war in masculinity, he may be feeling some of that frustration, but there is hope.

Nancy Pearcey: Well, because nominal Christian men are even worse than secular men and had the highest rate of domestic abuse and violence, I had to have two chapters on abuse in the book there at the end. And so that's my message for the women who actually are still in the middle of this, who may be in a difficult home situation with an abusive, verbally or physically, abusive man. And until very recently, the church has dealt with this very poorly. They've tended to blame the woman. And partly that's because it's a woman who's coming to them. Men don't come for advice, but the woman comes.

So what happens is they say, well, if you would just love more, if you would forgive more, if you would submit more, if you would cook his favorite foods. Then one woman that I interviewed for the book said, her elders said, if you would just do all of this, he would blossom into the man you want him to be. Well, the trouble is that's not how bullies are. If somebody's willing to hurt you

to get his way, he is a bully. And we all know from the playground bully, if you acquiesce or try to placate them, they just get worse.

Roger Marsh: Kindness is weakness to the bully.

Nancy Pearcey: Kindness is... I have that in the book. That's right. Or even in international affairs, a belligerent nation, you don't try to placate them, they get worse. And so I do have some really good material that books by Christian therapists have changed their way of advising Christian women. And they focus now primarily on what Jesus said in Matthew 18, which is, if somebody's sinning, the biblical response is to confront them, loving confrontation. And if they don't listen to you, you bring a few more witnesses. And if they don't listen to them, you take it before the church. And if they still don't listen to them, that might be a time for some church discipline. It's odd to me that we haven't figured that out until recently, that if this is sin, you treat it like any other sin.

Roger Marsh: It's hiding in plain sight. And when you think about it, and I've actually had this experience with a dear friend of mine who went through a false accusation and wound up going through the more people came forward, eventually they wound up coming to him and having a church council meeting and he said, look, I didn't do what you're accusing me of doing. And he was eventually exonerated. It's the only time in my life I've ever heard of a church doing that. And then to have what you're saying is, Hey, why don't we bring a domestic issue into that light too? This is one place where a woman really can stand up and say, look, I've got the scars. What do they say in the culture? I've got receipts. And quite frankly, we need to deal with this, and the church needs to deal with it too.

There are a lot of pastors who are listening to this conversation right now, and they're getting a little nervous because quite frankly, they know there's someone in their church right now who's on the council, who's a major donor, who has an issue like this. And they are in that nominal category you just described.

Nancy Pearcey: Yes. And just to clarify the numbers, nominals have the worst rate of domestic violence, but church going man is not zero. Like my dad, he was a very rigorous church-goer. Every Sunday morning we were there, we had six kids all lined up at the front of the church.

Roger Marsh: Wow. Wow. You were that family, long before they had bumper stickers with that family on the back, you were there. But think about it though. Your dad was a rigorous church-goer, but he sounded like he was very nominal in his faith.

Nancy Pearcey: Exactly.

Roger Marsh: Yeah.

Nancy Pearcey: You would never know at home that they were Christian. And my parents were respectable people. They didn't do any obvious sins. But there was nothing that suggested that they had a personal, vibrant relationship with God that was transforming their lives, that they really drew on for daily strength and so on. No, there was none of that personal relationship with God. So yeah, you're right. But he would've qualified for the church going in the survey. And so that's where it is true that we do find some people who on the outside may appear to be in the church going category, but who are actually nominal in their lives. So I think that that's important for people to realize.

And I do have quotes from Stephen Tracy. He's at Phoenix Seminary, and he said when he first started out as a young pastor, he was sure his church would not have these issues. And the women's group brought in somebody to speak on abuse, and he was offended that they would bring somebody into his church to talk about abuse. And then he found out that abuse was happening in several families, including one of the elders. One of the elders' wife had been hospitalized multiple times because of such severe physical abuse. Well, and another one had been sexually abusing his kids and was in court for that. So his advice is preach on abuse even if you don't think it's in your congregation, because it probably is. And you need to be able to signal that this is something you're going to take seriously.

Roger Marsh: Tough issues to deal with. And yet the church does play a huge role in reconciling this issue of toxic masculinity. Nancy, we've got about a minute left in our time together as we've been discussing your book, *The Toxic War on Masculinity: How Christianity Reconciles the Sexes*. Give us some hope, give us some encouragement. We've wandered down a little lane here that's got some shadows on it, but we know there's sunshine for those who will walk in the light that God has prepared for us understanding masculinity, living it.

Nancy Pearcey: Yes. Let me come back to the studies. This is the most data-driven book I've written that's got a lot of studies. So it's not just somebody's opinion. So I suggest that we take these studies on the active church-going Christian men into our churches. I had a graduate student who was the leader of the women's group at a large Baptist church in Houston, and she said, on Mother's Day, we handed out roses and told the woman they're wonderful. On Father's Day, we scolded the men and told them to do better. And so my overarching message here is stop the scolding and start encouraging men. Bring this data into the churches, teach it to the men, and encourage the ones who are doing well. I think that's a great place to start, is that the churches themselves take advantage of this data. It's Christian social scientists, psychologists, and sociologists. The data is out there. We look up my ed notes and find the data and bring it into your churches.

Roger Marsh: Nancy Pearcey, the time has gone by much too quickly. We've got so much food for thought. Thank you for sharing it with us today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Nancy Pearcey: Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

Roger Marsh: And that concludes a really powerful conversation I was privileged to have with author Nancy Pearcey today here on Family Talk. I hope today's program brought you encouragement and hope. By the way, if you'd like to learn more about Nancy or her brand new book called *The Toxic War on Masculinity: How Christianity Reconciles the Sexes*, visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. You know, it's no secret that men are called to lead their families. And that is a big task, especially when you consider that not all men have been taught what it means to stand up and be a God-led father and husband. Together men need to stand up and support each other as leaders and teachers and servants of the Lord. If you'd like some encouragement and tips in this area and how to invest in your child's life, Dad, we have a couple of resources to share with you today. First is our new free 5 day email series called, "Dads, It's Time to Step Up." You can start receiving yours today when you click the link at the bottom of today's broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And speaking of fathers, you know the bond between a dad and his son is so precious, yet it's a bond not easily formed, especially if dad does not know how to nurture it. That's why we are partnering with our friends at Trail Life USA, to help make available to you a new devotional designed specifically for fathers and sons. It's entitled, *Trail Ready: 101 Devotions for Dads with Boys*. We'll be happy to send you a copy as our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute this month, and especially with Father's Day coming up this Sunday, it's a great resource to have on hand for your dad or for the father figure in your life. Now to receive your copy, visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and then click the link at the bottom of today's broadcast page. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and then look for that link at the bottom of today's broadcast page and click it. And if you prefer, you can also make your request known over the phone. 877-732-6825 is the number to call. 877-732-6825. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for joining us today. We pray that you have a blessed rest of your day, and be sure to join us again tomorrow right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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