



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Straight Talk to Young Couples – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Kay Coles James

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**Dr. James Dobson:** Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

**Roger Marsh:** Welcome everyone to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. You know, the foundation of the family is a solid God-led marriage, and young couples today certainly need lots of encouragement and guidance to weather the storms that they certainly will face in life together. You're about to hear a classic conversation today here on Family Talk that will continue over onto tomorrow's program as well. It features our own Dr. James Dobson, and author and speaker Kay Coles James. Together, they will explain what it takes to be with one person for the rest of a lifetime in the covenant of marriage. They'll also banter a bit about some of the pitfalls couples will surely encounter along the way.

Our guest today, Kay Coles James, currently serves as secretary of the Commonwealth of Virginia, a position she has held since January 2022. She is also the founder and chairwoman of the Gloucester Institute, which teaches leadership skills to young African Americans. She is the former president of the Heritage Foundation where she served from 2018 to 2021. She also served in the President George W. Bush administration as director of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, overseeing 1.8 million government employees. Kay earned her law degree from Pepperdine University and she and her husband, Charles James Sr., are the parents of three grown children and they also have several grandchildren as well. Let's join Kay Coles James and Dr. Dobson right now on this classic edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

**Dr. James Dobson:** Kay is so accomplished in so many ways. And then of course, you would put high on a list of credentials, being a wife to Charles and a mother to three.

**Kay Coles James:** I would put it as the highest on the list.

**Dr. James Dobson:** That's always been what you've cared about most.

**Kay Coles James:** Absolutely.

**Dr. James Dobson:** And for a woman that's accomplished this much, Kay, how do you explain that?

Kay Coles James: All that says is I can't keep a job. That's all that means.

Dr. James Dobson: Not so, not so.

Kay Coles James: No. I tell you, being a wife and a mom is the highest, highest calling I have and I just am privileged to be married to one of the most incredible men in the times that we live in, Jim.

Dr. James Dobson: He's a neat guy.

Kay Coles James: Truly. I took the time to call him from the airport this morning just to let him know how much I love him and how much I appreciate his being willing to let our lives be so open and to be so vulnerable so that we could share what God had taught us. I believe that everything that's ever happened to me has been a family calling, and our kids have known that from the very beginning. They've been involved in everything that Charles and I have ever done as a couple. And so there have been some special things that they've had to go through as the kids of, and a part of that is having your life dropped into one of mom's speeches every now and then or being the son and being trotted out and saying, "Will one of you people marry this guy?" So it's not been easy being a child of Charles and Kay.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, this book has a wonderful title and great content. It's called *What I Wish I'd Have Known Before I Got Married*, and the subtitle up at the top is *Keepin' It Real*. Kay Coles James. That title really does say it all, doesn't it, Kay? You are trying to tell people what you wish that somebody had told you.

Kay Coles James: Right. Well, there is an entity in the black community called sista-girlfriend.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Kay Coles James: Part sister, part friend. But she's characterized by being a straight talkin', tellin' it like it is. No holes barred. She'll go where other people are hesitant to go and I wanted to write the book from that perspective.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, let me get it straight sister-girlfriend.

Kay Coles James: You got to say it with sort of an ethnic...

Dr. James Dobson: Sista-goru. I can't do that.

Kay Coles James: Yeah, yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: I can't do that.

Kay Coles James: Work on it a little while. Sista-girlfriend.

Dr. James Dobson: And it's hyphenated.

Kay Coles James: Yes, absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: And the essence of it is telling it straight.

Kay Coles James: Keepin' it real, telling it like it is because when you're about to get married, you need somebody who will get in your face and ask you some tough questions and make you think through some difficult issues. And also to get your eyes wide open about the possibilities. And now I'm not sure that was always the case with Christian marriages because we assume that we were protected from many of the things that happened in the world. But quite frankly, the data tells us otherwise. Today, Jim, as you well know, I was surprised at the high divorce rate. I was shocked as I went to women's conferences and I heard that they were struggling in their marriages with husbands who were dealing with pornography. Now, these are Christian, I mean, saved married people.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Kay Coles James: Both parties love God, are struggling with these difficult issues. And so they encouraged me over and over again to answer and address some of those very specific issues. And then when my daughter came home with a young man and we could see it coming. We knew an engagement was about to happen. I began to go through, "Oh my word. Does she know this? Has she thought about that?" And I began to collect information that I think every mother would want their daughter to think through before getting married.

Dr. James Dobson: And this book is really both for those engaged and not yet married, and those that are newly married.

Kay Coles James: Absolutely. Because there's some things that you should think about ahead of time. But as I thought through some of the things that I wish I had known, some of those things came up in the early years of marriage, in year one through 10. And so I would say if you are in that range, there's probably something in this book that would speak to you.

Dr. James Dobson: Kay, honestly, was there a lot that you didn't know when you got married? Looking back on it?

Kay Coles James: It's surprising how much I didn't know. But yes, I believe that's the case.

Dr. James Dobson: And you wish someone had sat down and told you these things?

Kay Coles James: That's exactly right. And I found, Jim, that even in talking to some of my married Christian friends, there were certain things that they held closely and didn't tell us. They didn't tell us how they were struggling financially. Years later, someone that I admired and respected, told me about how she used to have to scrimp

and save for grocery money. Well, I wish I had known that at the time because when that happened to me, I thought there was something unusual or Charles and I were not managing well. And it's just struggling young couples trying to make ends meet.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you make some mistakes at that time?

Kay Coles James: Oh, made some huge mistakes, huge mistakes. Financial mistakes, credit cards. Oh, I wish I had known about credit cards. I wish I'd known about compound interest when I first got married. I'd be rich today if I had only known and practiced that principle. But the list goes on, and Charles and I as we thought through these things for this book, tried to make it as comprehensive as we could. Finances is a big one though.

Dr. James Dobson: I made a lot of mistakes too. Shirley and I both did, but that's not one of them in the financial area. And the reason is because I grew up in a college town and I saw these young students trying to live on love and having nothing and having orange crates for furniture. And when I was just a little kid, I looked at that and said, "Man, that doesn't work. I'm not going to do that." So for one thing, we didn't get married till we were both out of college and I was almost through my master's degree. And then I was probably a stick in the mud, but I was very, very careful about spending money on credit especially. We bought a television set, \$25 a month we paid for that and I thought I was in debt up to my ears. So I didn't make that mistake. I made a lot of others I'm probably not going to tell you about, but that's not...

Kay Coles James: Oh, in our family as I was growing up, I mean, we started out as you know, very poor, and the thought that somebody would actually give you a credit card was incredible. So I thought if they gave it to you, you should use it as often as you could.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me tell you the mistake I did make. I made a serious mistake. I was an only child and I was the delight of both my mother and father. I had a very, very happy childhood and I was the centerpiece for them. And you can imagine when I got married that I was set up for certain difficulties because that relationship had to change and I didn't let it change fast enough. There were times when Shirley felt kind of like a third wheel or something, like she was maybe grafted on or added on or something. And I could have done a whole lot more to help her with the mother-in-law situation.

Kay Coles James: Oh yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Because Shirley and my mother loved each other but there was this underlying tension there that went on for several years and never did break out into the open. It would've been better if it did. It was just there.

Kay Coles James: You just hit on one that's in there that I wish I had known about the special relationship between mothers and sons.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Kay Coles James: And what I remember very early on, it was about the second week of marriage and Charles came down with a really bad strep throat, very ill, very sick. And his mom in her very loving way, said, "I tell you what, Kay. Why don't you sleep out in the living room on the pullout and I'll sleep in the bedroom and get up all night with him and I'll take care of him." And I said, "What in the world?" She said, "Well, I know you have to work and I want you to get your rest. So I'll come over and I'll take care of Charles." And that to me was a real eye opener. And unfortunately, I did the same thing Shirley did. I pushed it down and didn't deal with it. And just was sort of angry and bitter about the special relationship that exists between mothers and sons and how we as wives need to navigate those waters and deal with those issues.

Dr. James Dobson: Listen, that's a tough one. Boy, that's a minefield for everybody concerned including the man. I can tell you.

Kay Coles James: Well, he's the only one incidentally, that I believe that can handle it and do something about it.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, yeah. Well, you need to talk to him.

Kay Coles James: Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: But I wish that somebody could have talked to me because I easily could have greased the skids there. I could have made Shirley more comfortable. I could have let my mother know what the boundaries were. I could have done that.

Kay Coles James: Well think just as women, if we just even understand the phenomena, and now, and now, I am one.

Dr. James Dobson: Yes.

Kay Coles James: I am the mother of sons. And so I am very, very sensitive to that relationship.

Dr. James Dobson: You began this book with dating relationships and the engagement and talked about Mr. Right and how you can know when you've found him.

Kay Coles James: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: You're basically talking to young women here.

Kay Coles James: Well, it's even a more narrow audience than that. It's young women for sure. But young Christian women or women that come from the Judeo-Christian ethic

or background. And I think I really feel a need to say that because in the context of talking about the dating relationship, it came as an absolute surprise to me in the environment in which we live, that I would have to make a strong case for chastity to Christian women.

Dr. James Dobson: Isn't that amazing?

Kay Coles James: And just in going around and talking about this book, I was interviewed by a young, perky, absolutely darling, sweet, Christian woman, young girl. And as we talked about that and I raised that issue, I noticed she got a little teary-eyed. And when the interview finished, she said, "Well, I'm almost engaged." And I thought, "Oh my gosh. No, you aren't." And I came right out and asked her, and I said, "Are you engaged in premarital sex? Are you sleeping with that young man?" And she said, "Yes, ma'am." And I have been horrified. And so I really did feel a need to go back in and make the case for chastity to Christian young women. But I was shocked that I had to make a case for chastity yet again for God's women. But we have to say it. We have to say it.

Dr. James Dobson: Having grown up in a very different era, I am still shocked by it and horrified by it because it's not only an offense against God.

Kay Coles James: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: But it is the worst thing especially a woman can do. She's got far more to lose than the guy. He doesn't get pregnant. And most of the sexually transmitted diseases affect her more than him, including infertility problems and all kinds of things.

Kay Coles James: Well, I make the case as strongly as I know how because I found a need to do that. And I was surprised.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's go back to this question. How do you know when you found Mr. Right?

Kay Coles James: Oh. I'm not sure there's an easy answer for that. I do believe that there are certain steps that you can and should go through. The one point that I do make is that there's a reason why they said love is blind. And I really believe when you're in the middle of a love relationship, sometimes it is very difficult to see. And that's why God encourages us to seek the counsel of the wises and to seek those who know you best. One of the things we said to Bizzie, my daughter, is that it was important for her to, number one, the person who knows her best, cares about her the most, loves her and wants nothing but the best and the highest for her is her dad.

And so the young man understood there was to be no question and talk of marriage until he'd had a conversation with her father. So that was number one. Realize that's old-fashioned, outdated. Realize that there are many women who

are not in a relationship with their father where they have that kind of trust. But for them, I say, "Seek out those individuals who know and love you best. Seek their wisdom. Seek their counsel and listen to what they have to say. Listen, if there's doubt." Oh, I cannot tell you the number of people who walk down the aisle with doubt and questions.

Dr. James Dobson: On the other hand, if you don't feel a little anxiety about that decision, you don't understand the gravity of the whole thing.

Kay Coles James: Anxiety, yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Kay Coles James: Doubt about whether it's right, no.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Kay Coles James: No.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you talk there about forever, understanding what forever is. I thought that was outstanding, Kay.

Kay Coles James: Oh, Jim.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Explain what you mean about that word.

Kay Coles James: Well, I believed that marriage was forever. I was counseled that way before I got married. I knew that. But it wasn't until about year seven when we were in this relationship and it hit me that I'm mad at this man. He's laying next to me in bed and I can't make him go away. And that's when the concept of forever really sunk in, that forever really did mean forever. My goodness. Quite frankly at that stage in our marriage when that hit me, I was really down for a very long time because of all of the things that I understood were wrong in him or not right about our relationship. And it wasn't like I was going to get to start all over with somebody else. This was it.

And so at one level, I knew that it was forever and on another level, it didn't sink in until about year six or seven. But I have to tell you that while that was my struggle, one of my very dear friends that I let read the galley for this said, "Kay, that's not where I was." For her, she got married believing that forever meant forever. And she was absolutely shocked and devastated when she found out it wasn't. And so she had...

Dr. James Dobson: Because he left?

Kay Coles James: Yes. As a Christian woman, she had to deal with the fact that when she got married, she thought it was forever. She planned for it to be forever. She was a

full-time homemaker raising a family. Not even a clue that one day her whole life could come crashing down around her. And so she had to deal with the fact that forever didn't mean forever. And for a huge percentage of Christian women unfortunately, that's the reality. And so I don't know where individual listeners may be with that, but it is a struggle either way.

Dr. James Dobson: I would like to say something to every engaged couple, every couple that thinks they're in love, and probably they are. I would like to say something that I've never heard anyone say to those in that situation. But I'm about to give them the best advice anybody's ever going to give them. I would like to tell them to take a look at that person that they're so in love with, that person that they can't even imagine a day without, that person who fills their entire world, that person that is a dream come true for them. Take a look at that person and then understand that that person is shot full of flaws. It is the human condition.

Kay Coles James: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: You're going to discover all kinds of flaws that you don't see right now. Things that irritate you, things that bother you, things that you wish were different, things that you may try to change. And he's going to look at you and see all kinds of inadequacies and shortcomings because that's the human condition. That's who we are.

Kay Coles James: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: And we deny that and discover them on the honeymoon, and all of a sudden, you're claustrophobic.

Kay Coles James: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Because you can't get away from this person.

Kay Coles James: Well, there are two things in there that I said I wish I had known beforehand, one of which is... Oh, and this one was a hard one. There's some things about him which are never going to change.

Dr. James Dobson: Absolutely.

Kay Coles James: And oh my word, when that one hit me, I was devastated. I thought I could read enough books, listen to enough tapes, highlight them and leave them on his side of the bed, pray enough, cry enough that that was going to change. Now, in God's infinite wisdom, I don't know why those annoying things will never change but I have had to come to the conclusion that some of them will never. And you know what? Charles James deserves what all of us deserve I believe, which is to be loved unconditionally, even with those things about him that will never, ever change.



And the other thing I wish I had known, someone told Bizzie right before she got married, one of our dear friends, Carol Arnold, we were having dinner together. And she looks at Bizzie and says, "Are there enough things that you all share in common? Your goals, your aspirations, your faith, your politics, all of that... And she went through that whole list... So that on any given day that you wake up and you look at him and you just don't like him."

Dr. James Dobson: Because that moment will come.

Kay Coles James: Because that moment will come. And she said, "You know what? That moment may last a few seconds, a few days, a few weeks. God forbid, but it could happen a few months." And in some marriages that I have known of, Jim, even a few years. When that happens, is there enough that you have in common to keep you going through that time until you can rekindle and rebuild? And I thought that was an interesting thing and I didn't quite get it at the moment when she asked her that question. But when you share a common faith, when you share a common set of core values and beliefs, when you share a same vision about where you want to go in your life, when you go through those periods, those dry spells that inevitably come in a marriage, is there enough there that you like that when you don't feel the love, it can keep you going?

Dr. James Dobson: Is forever still forever under those circumstances?

Kay Coles James: Forever is still forever then. You can't get out just because you don't like them today.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. You should not go into it under those circumstances.

Kay Coles James: No.

Dr. James Dobson: What do you tell a young woman who is in a prolonged relationship with somebody she loves, who will not commit to her?

Kay Coles James: Leave him. Kick him to the curb. Get out of that relationship.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Kay Coles James: I can think of dozens of... I told you the name of the book is *Keepin' it Real*. I can think of many young women that I know of right now that are far too accessible, that are caring for these young men. They cook for them. They go over and clean their apartments, whatever they need. They edit their papers for work and it really is a setup. I say the minute that you know that this is someone you want to spend the rest of your life with, this is what I say to guys, put a ring on a finger, get a date and make it happen. The minute that you know that this isn't the person, get out of the relationship. But so many guys are being catered to and cared for and it's a mother replacement, that they will stay in that relationship for years.

Dr. James Dobson: Women wouldn't put up with that in the past.

Kay Coles James: No.

Dr. James Dobson: Certainly not to this degree.

Kay Coles James: No, and I don't know...

Dr. James Dobson: Women are so aggressive with guys. You and I were talking at lunch a while back about the women that call a guy over and over. They scare guys to death. Young men don't like to be pursued. They want to pursue. I mean, they may like it, but it's not healthy for the relationship.

Kay Coles James: No, it isn't. One of the most compelling reasons to break off that relationship is while you're spending time taking care of him, God may have someone else out there for you that you aren't available to meet because you're stuck in a relationship with a guy that won't commit. Leave him.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. You've flown long way to be here today. Let's talk next time, can we?

Kay Coles James: Aw, look forward to it.

Roger Marsh: Well, what practical advice from Kay Coles James and our own Dr. James Dobson today here on Family Talk. Be sure to join us again tomorrow to hear them explain what couples need to consider as they prepare for a lifetime together beyond the wedding day. That includes a vow of purity. Then of course, courtship, involving prayer and support from the parents. And finally, some premarital counseling once engaged to set a young couple on the right path. I say this so that the altar is just the beginning of a sacred bond of trust and respect that will as Dr. Dobson said in his book of the same title, *A Love That Lasts for a Lifetime*.

Now, friends, during the month of June, you may have heard that we had a matching grant in place for \$300,000. Well, I am excited to announce that your response was mighty and overwhelming. Thanks to you, we met our match and now we are able to create more programs and materials for moms and dads and people everywhere. Here now is some more good news. Over the next couple of weeks, we will be explaining how you can get involved and come alongside us to support expecting parents, young families, and new mothers in need.

You know, in today's culture, men often receive more pressure than praise. Finding time for rest and recharge can be quite difficult. It definitely isn't easy and you are not meant to make this journey all by yourself. So we want you to know that the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is here for you with an abundance of resources, with prayer and encouragement. That's why I encourage you to sign up right now for our 10-day Straight Talk to Men email series. It just might be the thing you're looking for to sharpen the tools God has

already given you to live your life amidst today's confusing and sometimes broken culture. To sign up, simply visit [drjamesdobson.org/straighttalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/straighttalk). That's [drjamesdobson.org/straighttalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/straighttalk).

I'm Roger Marsh inviting you to join us again tomorrow to hear more from Kay Coles James and our own Dr. James Dobson about what couples need to think about to be successful beyond the big day. You've been listening to Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

Announcer:

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