



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Discovering the Abundant Life

Guest(s): John Eldredge

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

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome friends to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Do you ever think about how Jesus was a man, that walked on the earth? Well, in the scriptures in Philippians 2:7 we read, "But He, Jesus, emptied Himself, taking upon Himself the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men." Jesus Christ is the true example of who and what we are called by God to be. He was here to serve, a concept we can sometimes forget to show to others through our own grace and kindness.

Now, as for men living in today's society, sadly, many guys are confused by what it means to be a man. Masculinity is under attack at its core, and that includes the biological definition of what it means to be a man or a woman, for that matter. In our culture, there is no longer a rite of passage for a young boy to know that he has truly become a man. Many of the markers of what manhood is all about, have been lost from generation to generation.

In today's classic conversation here on Family Talk, you're going to hear our own Dr. James Dobson talking with John Eldredge about what it means to be a man. John Eldredge is a bestselling author, counselor, and teacher. He is the president of Wild at Heart, a ministry devoted to helping men discover the heart of God. John earned his undergraduate degree in theater at Cal Poly University, and actually directed a theater company in Los Angeles for several years before moving to Colorado.

John eventually earned his master's degree in counseling from Colorado Christian University, and has worked as a counselor in private practice before launching what is now known as Wild at Heart in the year 2000. John and his wife, Stasi, have three grown sons, Samuel, Blaine, and Luke. Let's join our own Dr. James Dobson and author and counselor, John Eldredge, as they discuss the meaning of manhood right here on Family Talk.

John Eldredge: Isaiah, in chapter 61, Jesus says, "I've come to heal the brokenhearted and set

the captive free." It's actually that passage that He quotes when He announces His ministry after the trial in the wilderness. He comes into that first moment in the synagogue and all eyes are on Him.

They give Him the scroll of Isaiah and He goes down to what we would call chapter 61, and He says, "Here's why I've come. I really want to heal you, and I want to set you genuinely free to be my own again." That's what we do primarily for men. It all started with men, giving men back their masculinity, restoring them as men or being used by God to restore them.

Dr. James Dobson: What takes place? How do you go about doing that?

John Eldredge: Yeah. We take men into the deep places of the image of God in them. When God created man in His image, He did it male and female, you see? So, they have a masculine heart or a masculine soul, and that soul has been wounded and they don't know who they are as men. They are lost, many of them.

Dr. James Dobson: You can say that as a generalization, most of the men who come do not know what it means to be a man.

John Eldredge: No, they don't. They don't, Jim. Your ministry has been built around trying to salvage what has happened because of that, either in the home or in the community.

Dr. James Dobson: That's right.

John Eldredge: Right?

Dr. James Dobson: That's right.

John Eldredge: It has been the loss of men. We have a lot of men walking around, but not real men. Where are they? They are lost and they are wounded. In some ways, what we've discovered is all a man needs is permission. Permission to admit his real desires as a man.

What he really wants as a man, that battle to fight and venture, and all of that. Permission to admit his wound, which primarily probably came through his dad, who did not tell him, "You are a man."

Dr. James Dobson: Your assumption is that almost every man is wounded one way or another.

John Eldredge: I've never met one who isn't, ever. Anywhere we run into men, I've never met one who isn't because we live a long way from Eden. This isn't a world that we were designed to grow up in. Little boys, they don't hear from their dads what they need to hear when they're growing up. That's the best case scenario. What actually happens is all kinds of things are said and done to them, that wound them deeply as boys and they never become men. David in the Psalm says, "Be merciful to me, Lord. Deal well with me out of your love, for my heart

is wounded within me." Now, he was a man's man. I mean, come on, right? Goliath, the Philistines, all those stories.

Dr. James Dobson: A warrior.

John Eldredge: He was a warrior and a king and a great man in many ways, and yet he knew the reality of a wound in the soul, and he begged God to come and heal him. Then that's what Jesus announces that He came to do. You see, it's not just I want to shape up your behavior, right? You know, the Pharisees were great at getting the act together on the outside, but God says, "I want to change you from the inside out. Make you a new creation, restore you as my man."

Dr. James Dobson: You and I wrote books at the same time, not talking to each other, and yet there's great commonality between the two of them. My book, *Bringing Up Boys*, deals with the fact that boys don't know what it means to be a boy, and they certainly don't know what it means to be a man.

There's great confusion about their masculinity, and that's a major portion of the book. You really picked that theme up and you did it independently at the adult level and say, "Men don't know what it means to be a man either because of what they experienced when they were boys."

John Eldredge: Bingo, exactly. That our culture no longer knows how to initiate boys to men. There's a lot of boys around. We have no shortage of boys, but we don't know how to take them through that process of making them men. So that they know down in their hearts they have what it takes. They can stand up for what's right. They can come through. We don't know how to do that. Somewhere between boyhood and manhood, something gets lost.

Dr. James Dobson: I have read about some more primitive cultures, if you want to use that phrase, in Africa and other places where a boy turns 12 or 13, and then he is set out alone into the surrounding countryside to spend the night out there and to fight mythical lions, maybe real lions. When he comes back, he is transformed. He is a man from that time on. He fights in the wars, he acts and behaves like a man.

He puts away childish things. We don't have such an initiation here. If a person goes through high school and college and maybe even beyond, he is not even emancipated from his own parents. They may be still paying the bills for him, and there is no point at which he can say, "I'm a man, and this is what it means to be a man."

John Eldredge: Yeah. Jim, the Maasai tribe, for example, in Africa says, "You cannot court a woman until you have killed a lion as a young man." Now, that means with a primitive weapon, a spear or a club.

In other words, you have to know who you are first as a man, before you can go to a woman. Most of these guys just take their questions and their confusion to the woman, right? Then 20 years later, they wind up in our counseling offices.

Dr. James Dobson: You mentioned a minute or two ago that the masculine nature has been denied them, has been robbed. You also said that this wound that occurs frequently comes from the relationship with the father. What is it that fathers do, and what is it that the culture does to emasculate men?

John Eldredge: Let's start with the grounding, Genesis 1, "And God created them in His image, male and female, He created them." That's just so important for us to put out there, because when God gives the most important gift to mankind, His own image, He does it at the level of gender. It is either as a man or as a woman that we bear the image of God. When you start messing with gender, you're messing with the deepest thing about a person.

When a culture is confused about gender, you have a culture in its final stages. They're confused about the most essential things. Look at little boys. What do they want? You give a boy a bike, for example. Is it enough that he learns to ride it? See, he wants adventure, he wants danger. He wants a life of battle and risk, and all of that that we see wrapped up in boys. I can barely tuck my boys in at night without getting ambushed.

Just the other night, my son filled his blankets with his pillows and his stuffed animals, so it looked like he was lying in bed. He was waiting for me on top of the bookshelf to say prayers with him. He leapt from the top of the bookshelf onto me, and then of course, the wrestling match, and the laughter and all of that. They want to battle.

They play soldier and cowboy, and policemen and all of that. You see that in the heart of a boy. You don't have to make them want this. You have to let them be who they are.

Dr. James Dobson: What you're saying is the culture and sometimes their mothers, sometimes their fathers don't allow them to be wild at heart.

John Eldredge: No, isn't it true? Mom, bless her heart, she's the incarnation of mercy. Boys learn and little girls learn tenderness, mercy, unconditional love from mom. But mom's got to let go and she has to let those boys go with dad, you see, into the masculine world. They've got to go with dad to play basketball, to go hunting, to enter into that initiation process with dad. Here's one, because every little boy has one question, just one.

This is so simple. Every little boy's asking, "Do I have what it takes?" That whole thing of, "Look, no hands. Right? Or Can I jump off the dock into the lake, right? Or can I make the team?" Any of those things, it's always the same question, "Do I have what it takes?" He looks to dad to answer it. "Daddy, am I a real man? Do I have what it takes?"

And the power of the father to either bless or cripple, is just astounding. The rest of that boy's life will be shaped by how his dad answered or did not answer that question.

Dr. James Dobson: How is the question often answered?

John Eldredge: In passive fathers, with silence. You see, that was my story. My dad was a good man, and we had some early years together that were just precious to me. He taught me to fish, you know, and we'd spend a lot of time out there in a boat catching nothing, you see? But it was the time with my dad, and it was his delight in me that he wanted to be with me, you know, and then showing me how to do it. Right? Then he became an alcoholic and he just went silent.

Now, he was not a violent man and he wasn't a mean drunk, he was just gone. Some men just hear silence like me, and they have an unanswered question, you see? They typically become the driven men. They overcompensate, they become the hyper-achievers, or even the town bullies. They try and prove that they're something. You see, he wants to look like the man, but he doubts very much he is.

Then you have the violent fathers and their stories. Those men know what their wound are, you see. That young man was in my office not too long ago and two 13 years old, his parents were having an argument and he stepped in to defend mom. Now, you see, that's what a man is for, okay? That's what he's meant to do. Rise up, defend, protect. He stepped in between his mom and his dad, and his dad looked at him and he said, "You mama's boy."

Now he's 28 years old, and he's in my office and he says, "That's what I am. I'm a mama's boy." He cannot marry a woman, though he very much wants to find himself addicted to pornography. On and on the stories go, right? Because of that violent wound, that blow, that rejection, that name that he was given. "You are not a man and never will be."

Dr. James Dobson: John, there's so much there. You are saying that this is almost the entire culture.

John Eldredge: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: That everybody has been there, men especially have been there.

John Eldredge: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: By their inability to find that masculine place.

John Eldredge: Look at all the issues that you so deeply care about, divorce and the breakdown of the family, okay? Fatherless children, pornography, abortion, any of the major social issues, you take any of them, and they will find their root in the inability of men to be men.

To play the man to come through, because they've got that question in their soul. That question's never had an answer or it's had a devastating answer.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you think schools are emasculating boys?

John Eldredge: Is it the nature of a boy, honestly, to sit still for eight hours? The the very structure of it, okay? Then you've got to wonder why three to four times the number of boys, as girls are diagnosed as ADHD or ADD, or some learning disorder. They don't have a disease. They are Huck Finn, right? They are Tom Sawyer. They want out.

Of course, they're going to climb the banister. Of course, they're going to sock their classmate. They're made for a whole different kind of world. A world that you were describing of initiation and sort of a welcoming in saying, "You know what? That aggressive nature, that's a good thing." Now, not to hit your neighbor, but to defend, to protect. Those firemen that went up the stairs.

Dr. James Dobson: Now we admire them. They're heroes.

John Eldredge: Aren't they? Where did they get that courage? You see, that's deep in the masculine soul. The schools in large part take it away from boys.

Dr. James Dobson: That's what you were saying in your book, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul*, you're really authenticating masculinity. You're saying it's all right to be a little bit crazy, to be a hunter and a fisherman or a bungee jumper. Not everybody, however, has to do those things.

John Eldredge: My boys love to play chess, but they don't like to get beat, you see? Even there you know, in an intellectual game, a man still wants to win. He wants a battle to fight. Now, it doesn't have to be a literal battle. Some men are made to go to war to protect their country and to protect freedom, but other men fight other battles. He might be a doctor, and his calling may be to fight for the health of people, you see, to battle disease or injury or harm.

He might be a counselor, and his job is to battle the breakdown of a marriage or the loss of a child, you see? But a man needs a battle to fight. It is in his soul. Exodus 15:3, "The Lord is a warrior. The Lord is His name." You see? Whether it's hockey, and I'm not a hockey player, I weigh 135 pounds. I never did college football. I don't have trophies of game animals on my walls, but I want a battle to fight.

I know that I'm made in the image of that warrior God. Something happened for my son, Blaine, this weekend, and it wasn't a successful hunt. It was four and a half days in the woods with dad, keeping up with me over some pretty rough terrain, laughing together, you know, having some meals together, being invited into a masculine world. He was lit up. When he came home, he just told story after story to mom and his brothers.

It was a passage. It was part of that initiation where a young boy is brought into the company of men, and he is affirmed, and he is validated as a young man.

The other men that were in our company there would say things like, "Wow, Blaine. You were really something out there today."

Dr. James Dobson: One of my books was called Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives, mostly Straight Talk to Men was written first edition of it in 1980. It's still out there. If you get a copy today, you'll read there that I said, "The happiest days of my life were the days that I spent hunting with my dad." Again, it didn't matter if we got anything. It was the two of us out there. I was invited into a grownup, masculine world, and I absolutely loved it.

There were things that took place between my dad and me, the way he related to me there, that didn't happen any place else. I still look back on those times as just being absolutely precious. When I was five years old, my dad and I used to have kick fights. I was in kindergarten, and he would invite me to kick his shins, and I would go after him. Then he would inevitably block my kick by putting his shoe up, and I would run my shin into the bottom of his shoe.

I bruised myself up. My mother was horrified. She was saying, "Stop, stop, you must quit." I was laughing and he was laughing. I loved it, but that was an element of the same thing you're talking about.

John Eldredge: It is. You see, a boy needs to test his strength on his daddy's, and that's why they love to wrestle. My sons will sneak up in the kitchen when I'm making breakfast and pow, they'll just pop me one right in the shoulder. Your dad wasn't being unkind to you. They want to test their strength, you see, because they figure if we can take on the old bull, well then maybe we've got antlers of our own. Maybe we're something to reckon with. See, a man needs to know he's powerful.

He needs to know that. He needs to know he's got what it takes when the going gets tough. You'll watch little boys test that through their whole youth and up into their adolescence, and that whole thing with adolescent boys and fast cars, and you know, the shoot 'em up movies and that kind of thing. You look at that, that is not psychological disturbance brought on by violent television. They are looking for their masculinity. They're looking to know they're powerful.

Dr. James Dobson: It has to be controlled though, doesn't it? It has to be within certain limits.

John Eldredge: And shaped by the father.

Dr. James Dobson: Exactly.

John Eldredge: What we're trying to describe is the question boys are asking, "Daddy, do I have it? Do I have what it takes?" The role of the father to answer that question for his son not just once, but 1,000 times over his youth. If all you'll do now is just look for it when he's playing in the yard, when he's building a model airplane, the question will come up. "I can't do this. I don't have what it takes."

It's the father's role to step in and say, "Son, you do. You do." In fact, this is absolutely amazing, right before Jesus starts his official ministry, okay? He's obviously been in the carpenter shop for years, but He's now going public, okay? It's those last three years. He is baptized by John in the Jordan. He comes up out of the water, and what happens?

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the dove descends and said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased," and then He is led into the wilderness.

John Eldredge: You see, if the father speaks and he validates him, right? He basically says, "Jesus, you are the apple of my eye. You have what it takes." Now, this is amazing.

If Jesus needed to hear that, the Son of God needed those words from His Father before he launched into His greatest test of His life, how much more do we need to hear those as men?

Dr. James Dobson: Those events were back-to-back in His life.

John Eldredge: Weren't they?

Dr. James Dobson: The high point of His life undoubtedly was hearing those words from God, "This is my beloved Son." Straight-way, He was led into the low point of His life.

John Eldredge: And look where the devil attacks Him, "If you are the Son of God, if you are." Three times, He comes at Him attacking Him at His identity. You see, he tries to go after the very blessing.

Dr. James Dobson: It's really good to have you back, and thank you for what you're doing, and thank you for the insights that you're sharing with regard to masculinity. It's really been interesting to me to read what you've had to say in Wild at Heart.

Because it is the extension again, of what I was writing about in Bringing Up Boys and what happens when those needs are not met properly at that point, and they don't go away. They're still there at 30, 40, 50 years of age, aren't they?

John Eldredge: The good news is, Jim, is that those questions can be answered. The story is not over. A man doesn't have to live there. He can find from God what he didn't have from his father.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, John. Thank you for being with us.

John Eldredge: Great to be here.

Roger Marsh: Men do need to reclaim their identity in Christ and as men. You've been listening to John Eldredge, sharing with our own Dr. James Dobson here on Family Talk, about what makes a man and how to live an abundant life. Now, if you missed

any part of today's discussion, you can listen again on our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

That's D-R James Dobson dot O-R-G forward-slash family talk. Remember, you can now listen to our daily broadcasts in a quick and easy way through Amazon Alexa. The next time you have your friends all around the house and you can't get to the phone or radio, remember, you can still listen to our latest program through Alexa. Learn how to get started when you go to drjamesdobson.org/Alexa. That's D-R James Dobson dot O-R-G forward-slash Alexa.

Even though Rowe versus Wade was overturned just over a year ago, did you know that the fight to protect the preborn is far from over? To support expecting parents, young families, and new mothers in need, you can stand with us today. Too few people realize that the local pregnancy resource center is literally on the front lines of that mission field, sharing the gospel and ministering to pregnant women, young moms, and their children.

To encourage these inspiring ministries, the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute urges every church and Christian to adopt a PRC, (pregnancy resource center.) Now, to find a PRC in your area, you can go to a special web address that we have created for you at drjamesdobson.org/PRC. It's that simple. You can see all the pregnancy resource centers in your own community when you go to that link, and maybe there's one that God has placed on your heart for prayer and support.

Remember to keep these expecting moms and their babies in your prayers each and every day as well. Go to drjamesdobson.org/P-R-C. Well, that's all the time we have for today. I'm Roger Marsh, encouraging you to join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Till then, may God continue to richly bless you and your family.

Announcer:

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