



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Straight Talk to Young Couples – Part 2

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: Well, welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and on today's classic program, we will continue to hear some practical advice for engaged or newly married couples, as Kay Coles James is back with us one more time to offer more of her refined wisdom for part two of her conversation with our own Dr. James Dobson.

Marriage is a beautiful gift, and with God as the foundation, it can become stronger and even more splendid each and every year, even through the peaks and valleys that life will surely offer. Who better to guide a young couple in their journey than a seasoned God-led married couple who can share biblical wisdom? It's wise to be prepared for the wide array of circumstances that will test any marriage, and having a mentor will help a young husband or wife navigate the most challenging situations that are unforeseen along the way.

Kay Coles James will be sharing with us today about the importance of real mentorship, as well as insight from her book called *What I Wish I Had Known Before I Got Married: Keepin' it Real*. Kay Coles James is the secretary of the Commonwealth of Virginia, a position she has held since 2022. She's also the founder and chairwoman of the Gloucester Institute, which teaches leadership skills to young African Americans. Kay is the former president of the Heritage Foundation, where she served from 2018 to 2021. She earned her law degree from Pepperdine University. She and her husband, Charles James, Sr., are the parents of three grown children and the grandparents of several grandkids.

Let's join Kay Coles James and Dr. James Dobson right now for their continuing conversation on today's classic edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: We covered a lot of good stuff last time and we're going to dive right into the thick of things today. And, Kay, let me start with this, there are 50 different issues in your book that we could talk about and certainly begin with today. What kind of advice do you offer to young women who are preparing for marriage? I'm not talking about the wedding and the flowers and the

bridesmaids' dresses and all that. I'm talking about getting themselves ready for the experience of marriage. How do you do that?

Kay Coles James: Well, as a woman, I have to tell you that all of those other things we just mentioned are very important. It's very important what color those bridesmaid dresses are-

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, yeah. No, no, they're insignificant.

Kay Coles James: ... but I think it stands as an example for us. If we put all of that time and effort and energy and money into something that's going to last a few hours to prepare for that, do we spend near enough time preparing for something that's going to last a lifetime? And I don't think that we do in this country. Well, there were several things, and, truly, Charles was the author of the list, and those were the list of things that he felt Bizzie and Brandon needed to do in preparation. While I was covering those details, the calligrapher and the bridesmaids' dresses, Charles took on the task of getting them prepared emotionally and spiritually, and one of the things he said is, "Before you all get engaged, I want you to have counseling." And one of the reasons for that is that the engagement is in and of itself a covenant, it's a commitment, and you've given your word, and so before you get to that point, then all you want the pastor to do is say, "We've decided to do this and we just want you to help us."

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Yeah, put your blessing on.

Kay Coles James: Yeah, "Put your blessing on us and make it work." He insisted that they have pre-engagement counseling, and so that was one of the things that we recommended. We also said that, "Sweetheart, there are people who've loved you your entire life who know you better than you know your yourself. It's important that they get to know your potential spouse." We didn't want, on the wedding day at a crowded reception, for people to meet Brandon for the first time. One of the things Charles said they needed to do was to go back to our home church, spend time with friends, spend time with family, so that they would get to know him and give her the benefit of their insights and their thoughts and their wisdom.

Probably one of the most poignant times was Thanksgiving, when Charles's grandfather, who was in his nineties, said, "Come here, boy, sit down," and he said, "I want to-

Dr. James Dobson: Scared him to death probably.

Kay Coles James: Scared him to death, told him to sit down, and that man imparted wisdom to him like you would not believe. Old folks know some stuff. And, by the grace of God, one of the family members had a video camera and we were able to sneak it over and sit it down.

Dr. James Dobson: You got it on tape.

Kay Coles James: We got it on tape. We certainly did. And the wisdom of the elders in your life is so critical and so important. Then, after engagement, there was premarital counseling, where it was a little bit more specific and a little bit more pointed in terms of some of the questions and some of the things that they were to work through. I think those were some of the steps that we asked them to go through.

Dr. James Dobson: You talked in this book about a concept that's interesting to me. You call it preventative care? What do you mean by that?

Kay Coles James: Well, when I was secretary of health in Virginia, one of the things that I always talked about was prevention. It's far better to prevent a disease or a problem or an illness than it is to try to cure it once it's there. And I think that principle applies to marriages as well, that we should put some things in place that will help us to prevent problems that may come down the road. As an example, we recommend that, before you have your first big knockdown drag-out fight that you just can't seem to get around, that, together, you all agree who you're going to go to and whose wisdom and counsel you will seek, so that, before you are into a problem situation like that, you identify that person.

We go back over the basics. We tell them that you got to be involved in a local church. I don't mean just attend a church where you go for Sunday morning services. You need to be involved in a church where people know you, they're involved in your lives, where they can hold you accountable, when you're involved in a small group. When the problems start creeping up, you have the relationships in place with people who know you.

Dr. James Dobson: Including a mentor relationship.

Kay Coles James: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: You can't overstate that, can you?

Kay Coles James: I really strongly encourage every young woman to be involved in a relationship where she is mentoring someone younger and she is being mentored by someone older. And that certainly was helpful to me. I can remember one time being so annoyed and frustrated and angry with Charles, and I just wanted out. And I called one of my mentors and she said, "Honey, come on over, let's talk." She didn't get upset, she didn't panic, and she just recognized it for what it was, and I cried on her shoulder. She talked me through it, showed me where I was wrong in a very loving way, and sent me back in. I very much encourage that kind of relationship. We need women-to-women relationships. You can't do this by yourself. You need a woman you can pick up the phone and call and say, "Let me tell you what he did today," and she listens. And then you can call her back

two hours later and say, "Oh, let me tell you what he did today because he's the sweetest thing."

Dr. James Dobson: And that's year after year.

Kay Coles James: Year after year.

Dr. James Dobson: That's not just the first year of marriage.

Kay Coles James: No. No.

Dr. James Dobson: For those that are 30 and 35 and 40, they can still benefit from someone who's a little older. And that's Titus 2, isn't it?

Kay Coles James: Absolutely. Absolutely. You just can't isolate yourself. We were not made to be lone ranger Christians. God created us for fellowship and to be involved in those kinds of relationships. And I can tell you that they have kept us out of so much trouble, people who will get in your face, people who will be honest with you, people who will help you to keep it real. And I thank God for the people who've been that for me in my life over the years. And sometimes you don't want to hear what they have to say, but, boy, does it help.

Dr. James Dobson: One of the words of advice that I have offered to women, this is not particularly unique, you say it too, Kay, is that a man cannot meet all of a woman's need package. He can't. He's not geared for it. She needs something that he can't provide. She needs women friends. She needs that outlet. Women do something for one another that a man cannot provide, and then he provides something they can't, and it works vice versa too. A man needs his friends.

Kay Coles James: It sure does. And in the early days, when I was struggling with three young kids at home and it seemed impossible to have a life of my own, you couldn't even find time to take a nap or to go take a shower without three kids banging on the bathroom door to be let in, it seems almost impossible advice, but it's amazing, when you make it a priority, how creative you can be. I can remember, on more than one occasion, Charles coming home, and it had been one of those stressed-out days, and I met him at the door and handed him the baby, handed him the keys, and went to the library to read a book. And I wasn't gone long. I was only gone an hour and a half.

Dr. James Dobson: You knew you'd had it, didn't you?

Kay Coles James: I knew I'd had it, but I took that time to read something that I was interested in, and I encourage, that's one of the things in prevention, I encourage women to keep up their interests, to read, take a class, you're a far more interesting wife and, incidentally, it also has another side effect. One woman told me that she maintained her license and she took classes and kept up her professional license. Little did she know that in her future was an accident where her

husband was killed, and as a result of that, because she had kept up her professional license, because she had read, and because she had maintained a certain amount of currency-

Dr. James Dobson: She had something to fall back on.

Kay Coles James: ... she had something to fall back on.

Dr. James Dobson: Kay, you have counseled a lot of young women through the years, and with the phenomenon of divorce and family disintegration today, you find a lot of them are frightened because they've seen such a bad marriage at home. They've seen such conflict, they've seen a divorce, they've seen custody battles, they've seen it all, and they're afraid to commit to a marital relationship because they've never seen anything else. They don't know that it can work.

Kay Coles James: And, unfortunately, unfortunately, many of the young women that I've talked to have seen it and seen it in Christian marriages. Oh, that really grieves me. And so they are frightened. You used to find that it was just the guys who were afraid to make commitment, but there are many young women out there who are afraid to take that step. That's not the God we serve. He's not a God of fear or a God of anxiety, and he is able. Having said that, I think we're absolutely right to go into it with eyes wide open, recognizing that we need to be vigilant to protect and nurture and keep and grow our marriages.

Dr. James Dobson: What do you say to the couple that disagrees with regard to children? One of them wants them and the other one doesn't.

Kay Coles James: Ooh, there's a piece of advice I give way back, pre-marriage, which is somewhat controversial, I've been told, and that is, if you're not ready to have children, then don't get married. Ooh, and the reason I say that-

Dr. James Dobson: Because you can never be sure that you're going to prevent them.

Kay Coles James: That's exactly right. I know too many people who have gotten pregnant on honeymoons. And so a lot of young women that I know take issue with that, and my point is simply this, it can and does happen. And if there's some reason why you just don't want to have children right away, where it would be devastating, where your lives would be ruined, it's probably a good idea to postpone the marriage.

Dr. James Dobson: Didn't you have that conversation with Bizzie?

Kay Coles James: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. That's when she backed away from the table as well, because she said, "I'm not ready for that, maybe three or four years down the road, and I don't want to have kids right away." And I said, "Sweetie, you got to be prepared for that. It can happen."

Dr. James Dobson: Those who say that they can have a career and not be impeded by not having children ... talk about the career versus the full-time homemaker.

Kay Coles James: There are no easy answers. There are none. And I had to struggle with this because I knew of too many poor people who had no options, who had to work outside the home.

Dr. James Dobson: Your mother was one of them, wasn't she?

Kay Coles James: Absolutely. My mother was indeed one of those women. And so I really struggled with that to say, "Well, God, if that's the case, then are you saying that any mother who has to be put in that situation is then putting her kids at risk somehow?" But I believe in a gracious God who loves us and works out the details of our life, and so I think, Jim, that there are some hard and difficult questions that must be asked, but we must do it honestly. I found that, when making decisions about returning to work, very often, it is financial and it's quality of life. It is whether we can improve our quality of life, we can have a little more, we can do a little more, and it really isn't for necessity or living at a subsistence level.

Dr. James Dobson: Kay, there's a third, I wonder if you've seen it, and I'm almost reluctant, as a man, to say this. You could say it more easily. But I think some women want to work because it is quieter. There's less wear and tear on the nerves. An office is easier, in some ways, than having all these little children pulling on you. I'm going to get in trouble for that.

Kay Coles James: Having been guilty of that very thought myself, I remember during a rather hectic holiday season recently, my children are all adult children now, but they were all home for the holiday and I had the day off, and quite frankly, I decided to go to work that day because it was quieter. I could get more done. And so I know that that phenomena exists, but I can tell you this, I talk, in my first book, about my daughter, who is the one that this book was written for, and, too, when she was four years old, became critically ill and was lying in a hospital bed, and Charles and I looked up and saw a straight line on the monitor. And, at that moment, I never regretted one day of staying home. I never regretted taking the time to bake the cookies, to go on the walks. I never regretted that we didn't have enough money for me to have new ...I wore Charles' clothes, his jeans and his big baggy shirts, because we couldn't afford clothes for me.

And I never regretted any of that at that moment. You can't substitute time for money. You just can't. And I thought of that. And, when I was sitting on the front pew of the church when Charles was giving away our daughter, that concept, I sat there thinking, "What are you doing? You're giving away our daughter. What are you thinking?" I thought back to those early years that we'd had together and I would not have traded one day of it. I believe that, as women, we can have it all, just not all at the same time. And, if we trust God with the ordering of our lives, there's time and there's places for all of that. And,

yes, I was a business woman at the time and involved in corporate America, and there were many people who advised, "If you give up your job and come home, you're going to have a hard time breaking back in." And I've heard that line used on me in subsequent years.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, it doesn't work with you.

Kay Coles James: No, it doesn't. And I tell them, "If you're all that, if you are as good as you think you are, there's always a market for that kind of talent. You will break back in and it will not be a problem."

Dr. James Dobson: You're really not only affirming the mother at home, but you're saying, if given a choice at all, that's what you would recommend.

Kay Coles James: Oh, no question about it. I would not have traded one second of that time, not one second of it.

Dr. James Dobson: You do realize you're stirring guilt in the mix for those who have chosen something different.

Kay Coles James: Oh, but I think that that's something that every woman has to go before her God and be honest about, we must have intellectual integrity here, because I have respect for women who have no other options and they must do this. There are single women out there who are raising three and four kids and have no other option, and there's something called grace. In those situations, God gives us grace to cover those situations. I don't think He gives us grace to cover greed. I don't think He gives us grace to cover materialism. I don't think He gives us grace to cover selfishness. And so, if you are in that situation where you are bound to work where it must be, it's a situation where you must provide for your family, I think God's grace is sufficient.

Dr. James Dobson: Kay, quite honestly now, you have been involved in government at the highest level. You've served two presidents, you are a frequent visitor at the White House on business, and you have had the acclaim, and you've had the roar of the crowd and the smell of the greasepaint. You have been a speaker. You're an author. You've got three books. Does any of that compare with what you experienced with those three kids at all?

Kay Coles James: Doesn't even come close, not even close.

Dr. James Dobson: Is this propaganda or is this for real?

Kay Coles James: Not propaganda, this is heartfelt. I keep it real. I don't know how to do it any other way. And, when I talk about this, and I talk about it with such a passion, it's because of the joy, the love, the fulfillment that comes with being a mom and being a wife, that, for people that I love, I covet that for them. I would-

Dr. James Dobson: Do you say this to the young women?

Kay Coles James: Oh, absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you say this to those that have been married one or two or three years?

Kay Coles James: Absolutely, and particularly when they're in that stage of marriage where they just can't see it. It's not there for them. It's not happening. And I know. I've been there too. I understand what that feels like and it's not good. But the problem is that so many young people are used to not working at something. Marriage is hard, it's hard, and it's hard work.

Dr. James Dobson: It is.

Kay Coles James: And sometimes it can be painful to go through situations with husbands and kids, and I heard those words, but I didn't think they meant it was going to hurt that much or be that hard.

Dr. James Dobson: Being alone is painful too. Life is pain.

Kay Coles James: There you go. There you go. And so, as a result of that, I am very cognizant of the fact that, as I talk to people, that you have to tell them that, if they press it through, if they work it through, if they stick at it, the joy comes. I know so many of my friends who, when Charles and I were struggling in the early days of marriage, would say, "I wouldn't put up with that for a minute. Why do you take that?" and going on and on. And now they call us Clair and Cliff Huxtable, and the fact that we have such joy and enjoy each other, love each other so much, we've earned it.

Dr. James Dobson: Kay, you've got one funny recommendation in here, it's funny to me, and it is the notion that men and women communicate differently. No kidding.

Kay Coles James: Oh, golly day.

Dr. James Dobson: That is something that young couples need to know.

Kay Coles James: I had no idea. All of that Mars, Venus stuff, communicating, it's real, it's true. And one of the things that, really, Charles and I had to work through were the elements of how to talk to each other. He didn't realize that he came through as so stern. I used to tell him all the time, it's not just what you say, it's the way what you say it that's so important to me.

Dr. James Dobson: This is funny too. At the back of your book, you have two contrasting lists, one from the 1950s and the other from modern times, about what it takes to be a good wife. And there's some humorous stuff in there that I won't take the time to read, but the truth of the matter is that some of that old advice wasn't all that bad.

Kay Coles James: Well, some of the women from the '50s, although they laughed and made fun of them and came under much derision, the reality is that there's some solid good advice in there, but it has to be updated and modernized because we live in a totally different culture, in a totally different world, and women today are faced with so many more pressures, opportunities, stresses. The women's movement has opened up so much in a positive way. Jim, now I'm going to say a shocker for your audience. I think Christian women ought to lead the feminist movement, by the way, absolutely, because we ought to define it, and we are the ones who say, "We're glad we're women. God made us women. We're proud of what all that means, and we don't have to be like men to be equal to anybody."

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, man, that's pretty good stuff, Kay.

Kay Coles James: Well, I think that Christian women have a lot that we can share and show for the world. Women are looking for answers. They really are.

Dr. James Dobson: Kay, it's always good to have you here. The title of the book is *What I Wish I'd Known Before I Got Married*. If you have a young person or are one in that period of life, thinking about engagement or you are engaged or you've been married for, what, less than five, six, seven years?

Kay Coles James: I'd say up to 10 years.

Dr. James Dobson: 10 years, this is practical stuff, as we have just been demonstrating, and I hope you sell a million copies, Kay. Shirley, and I love you and Charles and are thankful for what the Lord is doing in your life. Blessings to you, Kay.

Kay Coles James: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: Give our love to Charles.

Kay Coles James: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Men and women certainly communicate in different ways, don't we? That definitely is important to understand and remember as you interact with your spouse. That was the aha lesson that I took away from today's conversation, and I hope you found it useful as well. We've just heard the conclusion of this two-part discussion featuring Kay Coles James and our very own Dr. James Dobson here on Family Talk.

Now to learn more about Kay Coles James, or to listen to any part of the conversation you may have missed, remember you can visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and hear part one and part two in their entirety. Again, that's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. You can listen online or you can also listen on the official Family Talk/JDFI app. Easily share the program with friends and loved ones from that technology. It's free to download from your

app store today and on all of our official digital platforms. You'll have access to literally thousands of Family Talk programs curated throughout the years, featuring the timeless truths and sage advice from Dr. Dobson and his esteemed colleagues.

Before we leave, I have one brief announcement to share. Of course, last month, during the month of June, we had a special matching grant in place of \$300,000, and I'm very excited to announce that all of your prayers and support have helped in a most significant way. Thanks to you, we met our match. Now we are able to increase our efforts and create more programs and materials for moms and dads and people everywhere. In addition, over the next few weeks, we will be explaining, sharing with you, how you can get involved and come alongside us to support expecting parents, young families, and new mothers in need.

I'm Roger Marsh, and from all of us here at the JDFI, we hope you have a peaceful and blessed weekend. Thanks for listening to Family Talk, and join us again Monday for another inspiring program.

Announcer:

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