



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Back from the Brink of Divorce – Part 1

Guest(s): Larry and Sue Wright

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Welcome everyone to Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, joined by your host, psychologist and best-selling author, Dr. James Dobson. Dr. Dobson, the broadcast that we have queued up today features a guest who I know held a special place in your heart.

Dr. James Dobson: The message that we're sharing today represents the recorded words of a very good friend. His name was Larry Wright, and he went to be with the Lord in 2001. He was one of the most godly men I've known, or shall I say, he became one of the most godly men I've ever known. His greatest passion was winning people to Jesus Christ. That's what he cared about more than anything else and he talked about it all the time. He spoke, in fact, every week to hundreds of men in the Phoenix area where many, many guys came to know the Lord. In fact, when he died, I was told that he had to be persuaded to get in the ambulance because he wanted to preach so badly. Here he was possibly dying of a heart attack and yet he didn't want to go to the hospital. It wasn't long after that, that he passed away. But oh, what a blessing he was to everyone who knew him. The reach of this man in Phoenix and around the country, it just can't be overstated and I had him on our broadcast too-

Roger Marsh: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: At one point, we'll talk about that later. The lessons he learned during that time are timeless. Larry Wright had so much natural wisdom about the importance of relationships with Christ. He and his wife, Sue, founded Abundant Life Ministry, which was an outreach to their friends and neighbors in Phoenix, Arizona, where they lived for many years. He also taught from the pulpit at Northwest Community Church.

Roger Marsh: Well, Dr. Dobson, with that said, let's listen now to Larry's message on this edition of Family Talk.

Larry Wright:

I'd like to take a few minutes to let you know a little bit also about the relationship between my wife, Sue, and I. I hope you get a chance to meet her before you leave tonight. Because when we were first married, I told her, I said, "Sweetheart, you're getting yourself a guy who is a real go-getter. I happen to be dynamic, hard charging, decision making, gifted, talented, and humble. I intend to provide for you everything any woman could possibly want." My generation knew that if you were going to be happy in this life, you had to be successful. Once you got the big home and the nice cars and the clothes and all the things that went along with it, ah, were you're going to have it made.

I said, "Sweetheart, in order to go out and conquer the world and provide these things that you want, I'm not going to see a whole lot of you in our early years of marriage, because you don't become a success by osmosis. It's going to take a lot of hours, a lot of hard work and will, of course, make some suggestion." So our relationship didn't get off to a real smooth start. Problems began to develop and I also discovered that if you're in a tremendously competitive business, the higher you go up the ladder, the more pressure comes. Every business man knows the time comes when you need to relax a little bit and get loose. I found this marvelous relaxer that was served about a mile south of where I worked, at a little place called Ken's. I used to get so relaxed I could hardly move.

Surprising enough, this created some problems in our relationship, because you wives are funny like that. Welcoming your husband home as he's bouncing off the walls, "Hi, sweetheart. How'd it go at the bar today?" So problems were created there. In addition to that, she began to do what every woman knows needs to be done. After the honeymoon, she began to spot some flaws and some zits that she didn't notice before. Like any dutiful wife, she began to mold me, or at least attempt to, into the man that she so richly deserved. She began of course, by feminine ploy number one, which is making suggestions to me over and over and over. And the more she suggested that I change my lifestyle, the more I went the other way, because there's no woman going to tell me what to do.

Then she saw that wasn't going to work, she began ploy number two, which is of course begging and pleading, "Please, please, good husbands and fathers come home. They come home sober. They play with the children. They do things with the family." I said, "Well, that makes sense to me. I've seen that on TV." I would try that for a while, but you see that wasn't my lifestyle. After a while, I'd go back to the way I was going and she saw that wasn't working so she began ploy number three, which we all know is threatening. "All right, if that's the way you're going to be, I've had you up to here. You either shape up or ship out." Well, I would ship out. I'd go to the closet, get my bowling bag, my tennis shoes, my racket and I would head out the back door saying, "Oh, free at last, hallelujah, I'm free at last."

Head out to the motel and after about a week or so, the restaurant food really gets bad and your laundry gets dirty and you get lonely and I'd call up and I'd say, "Sweetie, it's me. I've seen the light and I'm going to come back home if

you'll let me and things are going to really neat. I'm going to get off the sauce, I'm going to spend time. I'm going to let you do my laundry. Gosh, we'll have fun." I'd sweet talk my way back in the house and the same process would begin over and over again, until finally she didn't believe me anymore. She began to build up this wall, this barrier for self-protection, because I'd hurt her so many times. She saw that nothing was working because the problem was the more she tried to change me, the more I went to where I was having success.

Because out there you see, everybody was saying, "Oh, here he comes. Here's somebody, the life of the party. Let's buy him a drink. Hey, good to see you." But at home I was failing and nobody wants to hang around failure. So the more I began to fail here, the more time I spent over here and the more I was failing over there and so the more I stayed away from there until finally our relationship was just two people living together under the same roof, each going in a separate direction. The only feeling we had basically toward each other bordered on disgust. She didn't care for me and I really didn't give a bag of beans whether she did or not. We were still together for the sake of the children. Divorce is so messy, but nothing, nothing was there. Just a matter of when the breakup came, not whether.

My wife said, "We ought to start taking our kids to church," because every parent knows when your kids get up to a certain age, they need a little religious education. I mean, you don't want them to get weird. No Jesus t-shirts or anything like that, but a little religion never hurt any kids. So we began to pop ours off and one Sunday morning, my wife did something in this church called, receiving Christ as personal savior. I said, "Well, that is really neat because she needs that. She is an emotional wreck. I have personally seen to that. So I am glad that she's doing whatever this is that she's doing because now she can get together with these church women and they can start making quilts and knitting breechcloths for the Africans to cover up with. And collecting canned goods and doing all that wonderful stuff and she can get off my case and let me go ahead and do what I was doing."

I found out later she'd gone into conspiracy with these church women behind my back, and they began to pray for me. Well, isn't that wonderful? That's something else to keep them busy, out of the pool hall. So I was glad for that. My wife started changing right before my very eyes. I couldn't understand that she began to love me and be so kind and sweet to me, despite what I was doing and the turmoil I was creating. It really was a surprise and shocking to me. I couldn't figure out what was going on until finally it dawned on me what had happened. These church women had said, "Listen, here's a plan. You start being so nice and sweet and kind and loving to him, you're going to give him such a guilt trip because he's such a flake, that he's going to start being nice to you."

Well, listen, that wasn't going to work with me. I'd had a psychology course and the nicer and sweeter and more loving she was to me, the harder I came down on her. I said, "I can't believe you. I mean, we met in college. I thought you had some brains and now you are doing this blind leap you call whatever it is,

getting involved in this religious garbage. I can't believe you were so stupid," I said lovingly. Would have her in tears, but she kept going back to this woman's Bible study and kept loving me. I really came down on her, trying to break this little game she was playing. But I finally saw that it was real and she had something I didn't have.

I didn't want anybody to have something I didn't have and I began to investigate it. What's going on here? That's not my wife. Same cute little body, same pretty face, but my wife never treated me like that even at my best. A man I admired a great deal invited me to go to a home Bible study. Well, Sue wanted to go and he was a real man's man, with this attractive wife. A man who was successful in the community, which was surprising because I thought any Christian man of course, has got himself some kind of a crutch. He's a guy who can't hack it out there in the real world. He can't take the pressure, he doesn't know how to control things. He can't make decisions and he needs this sort of thing like my wife needed it.

And yet this man didn't fit that mold at all. He said, "Why don't you come to our house to a Bible study?" Sue said, "Please, please," so I thought I'd throw her this bone. Kept plying the pressure. I got to that meeting the way some of you guys got here tonight, no pressure at all. "All right, I took you out, we went to one of those religious things in 1980, that's it for the year. Get off my case." So we went to this Bible study for the first time in my life. I got into this book called the Bible. Now I had been to church, I had been preached to, at, through and around. But for the very first time I opened it for myself and I ran across the passage of Scripture that is in the process of transforming my life that said this: the 17th chapter of John, the third verse said, "You really want to know what life is all about?"

You see, that's all I wanted to know, I just wanted to live and I'd gone about it the best way I knew how. Setting goals, achieving them and looking around and saying, "What's missing?" Instead of getting happier and happier, the more I got, the more I wanted and there was an emptiness I couldn't explain. A wise man by the name of Pascal once said, "Within each individual is a God shaped vacuum," and we try to fill it with everything. Success, money, recreation, booze, sex, try to fill it with everything and yet still an emptiness. Jesus Christ was speaking and He said, "You want to know what life is really all about?" and that caught my eye. He said, "This is life eternal that they," talking about you and me, "might know the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent." He said, "That's life. Getting to know God through the person of Jesus Christ."

Well, I never heard of such a thing. I didn't understand that at all, but I'd missed life. I thought, "Well, let me check into this." I believed in God, I was no atheist. There was too much design in the universe for me not to realize behind it there had to be a designer. I said, "Isn't that enough? To believe in God?" The Bible said, "Listen, you believe in God?" So far so good. It's only one problem with believing in God and stopping there and that is the demons believe in God and it scares the snot out of them. Now that's a loose translation. That's not King

James, in case you're following along with me there. Says they're terrified because they know that they're going to have to stand up before a holy God one of these days and give some answers, the same as you and I are.

I said, "Well, listen, if it isn't enough to just believe in God, what do I do?" Jesus spoke and he said, "You believe in God, believe also in me." He said, "If you've seen me, you've seen the father." He said, "If you don't honor me, you don't honor the father." He said, "I and my father are one." One of His disciples turned to him and said, "Show us the father, let us see God and that'll be sufficient." The Lord Jesus turned to him and He said, "Have I been with you so long and still you don't know me?" Then it dawned on me there's only one way that any two people ever get to know each other, at one point in time, a meeting has got to take place. Christ said, "I'm standing outside the door of your life and I'm knocking."

He said, "If you do two things, I'll do two things." He said, "If any man, woman, boy, or girl hears my voice, that is recognizes that I am there wanting to come in and fill that emptiness, give your life and opens the door," because Christ comes in by invitation only. He cannot because he will not force himself on anybody. He said, "If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and a meeting is going to take place." On that basis, 13 years ago, I invited Jesus Christ into my life and a meeting took place. I couldn't understand why in the world suddenly my pathway wasn't strewn with rose petals, why all my problems didn't disappear. Why Sue didn't quit applying feminine ploys on me. Why when I looked in the mirror in the morning, there wasn't a gold ring forming above my head.

I said, "What's the matter? I did what I was supposed to do. I asked Christ into my life, where is it? Where's the reality of it?" I went back to this book and I reread that verse. "Life consists of getting to know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ who thou has sent." I said, "My goodness, it's possible for two people to meet and never really enter into the experience of the potential of that relationship if all they do is meet and one goes one way and one goes another." That if we're really going to get to know each other after the meeting takes place, we got to spend time together. Said, "If that's true with you and me, maybe that's true with Christ and I after the meeting takes place, if I'm going to get to experience the reality of the relationship, we got to spend time together communicating."

God, being very much aware of this, gave us this book called Bible. You want to get to know God? It'll never happen apart from His word. You see, God speaks to us through His word, we speak back to Him in prayer and two people who have met now begin to really get to know each other and the result of that, life. If that's true, then life is not something to go out and be squeezed and milked and chased after and grunted and groaned and stretched and strained for. It's merely a byproduct of simply getting to know God through the person of Christ and you look around and say, "Life is exciting, it's fun," because the promise of God is something that everybody in this room wants more than anything else in

the world: love. To love and be loved, to have peace in the midst of an unpeaceful world, to have joy, the kind that isn't dependent upon the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

God promises that to the one who comes to him through Jesus Christ and spends time communicating and getting to know Him. I began by believing that and I can stand up before you tonight and tell you about the reality of that, because I put it in the test tube of my life and it works.

When I was a youngster, I was a class disturber. It was my responsibility in life to entertain my classmates. From the first day when I was at school, when I pulled a chair out from under a little girl, all the way up through a freshman in high school, they beat me blue. That was back in the old days where they had the paddle hanging up there on the wall and it wasn't there for decoration either. Had the three holes in it to let the steam out. They weren't afraid of warping your little id back then.

Well, I don't remember exactly what it was that I did, but I know the teacher looked down at me and said, "Okay, that's it. When the bell rings, you've had it. You just sit there." Well, the bell rings, everybody heads out to the lockers, putting their books away, but she just sits there. I'm saying, "Come on, let's get this thing over with so I can get down to the cafeteria, eat, get out on the playground where the action is." But she sat there and sat there until all the lockers had quieted down and she knew everybody was down in the cafeteria. Then she got up. But instead of going to get the paddle, she came over and reached down and grabbed hold of my hand. A teacher holding the hand of a freshman. Well, nausea swept over my whole body, but she didn't care.

She said, "Come on," we got up, walked down the hall, down the steps into the cafeteria. There was the whole student body and here I come holding this teacher's hand. Well, they all broke out in the insane laughter, grabbing their stomachs, head falling over the mashed potatoes and gravy and I was so embarrassed I could have died. I just felt the blood rising in my face. She took me through the line, set me at the teacher's table. I had to eat there with every faculty member in that school, just embarrassed to death. And oh, I was ruined. The people I cared about the most, that I really wanted to love me, think I was cool, were laughing at me. Oh, she walked me down to the end of the hall and into her room and I don't remember whether she opened the door or I just walked under it. All I know, she had destroyed my image in front of the people that counted the most.

She went to the wall, got this paddle, said, "Bend over." Got back here, I was bawling my eyes out. Worst whipping I ever gotten. She hadn't even hit me yet. Gave me a little 80 pound swat, hurt so bad I never got another spanking at school after that. Because you know what hurts us is not so much what's done to us physically. It's when somebody puts us down. It's when they laugh at us. It's when they make fun of us and they talk about us behind our back. That hurts.

I can't help thinking of that without thinking of the Lord, Jesus Christ, God Himself looking down on this earth. People just like you and me, helpless and hopeless, falling short of what we wanted to be, much less what He wanted us to be. Knowing that the only answer was for Him to come down here, take on the form of the very people that He had created, walk among them, knowing in front that He was going to be laughed at, rejected, mocked, spat upon. Had His face beat to a pulp, His back turned into hamburger meat, crown thorns on His head, a spear jammed in His side, nailed on across like a common criminal, killed. Knew in front that's what's going to happen and that was what His reception was going to be. But He loved you and me enough to come anyway.

I don't understand that. I have no idea how anybody can love me and love you that much. But you see, whether we understand it or not is not the issue. We have to respond to it because whenever we find out that somebody loves us, somebody really cares for us, it automatically draws from us a response whether we mean for it too or not. The Bible says, "We love God because he first loved us." You see the principle? God says, "I love you. Now, what are you going to do about it?" Have to respond, you don't have any choice. I think it's exciting when the Bible talks about God's love. It's always in terms of what He did.

Now, we husbands learn very quickly that wives need to be told that they're loved. You make this abundantly plain to us. Fifteen minutes into the honeymoon Sue is saying, "Do you love me? Do you really love me?" Good grief, what are we doing here? Of course, I love you. What kind of a guy do you think I am? "But do you really, really love me?" The phone rings at the office, 17 guys standing around. "Hello. 'Do you love me?' You bet, that is certainly true. 'Yeah, but do you really? Do you really love me?' You can put me down a yes there too. 'Well, if you really love me, you'll say it. Come on, say it.' Listen, let me get back to you on that. We got a big meeting going on here. Don't ever call me at the office."

You girls let us know you need to be told you're loved. I kept telling Sue over and over again, "I love you. I really, I love you." And she kept asking, kept asking me all over. For pity's sake, what's going on? Then it dawned on me, maybe something about my actions were making my words ring hollow, that she obviously wasn't seeing too much of a display of it or she wouldn't keep asking me the question. See, the most important thing you and I can do as husbands is to make sure the woman we're married to is confident 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, that she is loved by whatever creative method and means you and I can muster up as men who have brains. If you convince your wife that she is secure in the middle of your love, you're going to have yourself a wife.

We don't have that trouble with God just mouthing the words because every time the Bible talks about God's love, it's always in terms of what He did. "For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here in is love, not that we loved God, because we don't. But that He loved us and gave His son to

be the perfect satisfaction, the perfect payment for your sins and mine. God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, God's enemies. Couldn't care less about Him, Christ died for us. God says, "I love you and it cost me a great deal to prove it, to demonstrate it. Now what are you going to do about it?"

Well, you have to respond and the response God is looking for is to say, "Listen, it only makes sense that if you've got a plan for my life, as you tell me you do, it must be better than mine. And I want you not just be my savior, but my Lord, because I want to live. I want to experience life as it was meant to be. I confess to you I don't love you the way ought to, not after what you've done for me, but I'm willing. I'm willing to let you do with me whatever you want. I'm willing to let you change me, transform me, to make my marriage into what you want it to be. Start with me."

Sue will tell you the first thing that happened to her when she came to know Christ is God turned her eyeballs around. Because it was all my fault, I knew it, she knew it. And suddenly God says, "There's nothing you can do about him, but there is something you can do about you." She'll tell you that she began to concentrate on being the kind of wife God wanted her to be. As she became that, He used her to reach out and touch me, my whole family and we've seen literally hundreds of other marriages become what God intended them to be because Christ came into the relationship.

Our marriage was ruined and God has marvelously and miraculously taken it and put it back together. We never thought we'd see 10 years and this year we celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary and it gets better every year because Christ came to live and gave us the only thing that we really needed in common. And it's our prayer and the only reason we have you here tonight is so that we can share that with you. It's our prayer that it'll become a reality to each one of you, to realize where life really is in all of its fullness and excitement. God says, "I love you. Oh, I love you and want you to come to me. Now, what are you going to do about it?" So you see, it's not a matter of whether we will respond, because we will. The only question is how?

Roger Marsh: Well, I am Roger Marsh and you have been listening to the late speaker, Larry Wright, here on Family Talk. I'm joined again by Dr. Dobson now and doctor, what a poignant message we heard today. Larry really provided us with a great reminder that we should prioritize our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Dr. James Dobson: The passion that he was known for was evident in what we heard today, even though the recording was poor. I want to speak directly to the listeners that were moved by what he had to say today. If you are interested in knowing more about having a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ, and there's nothing more valuable or wonderful in living in that, the relationship that Larry described in this broadcast, call us today. We have someone standing by who would love to talk to you about the most important decision you'll ever make.

Roger Marsh: Well that's right, Dr. Dobson. Our listeners can call toll free, (877) 732-6825 and a member of our team will be happy to pray with you. Again, that number, it's toll free, is (877) 732-6825. Thanks so much for joining us today. Remember, tomorrow we'll continue hearing from the Wrights through their meaningful conversation with Dr. Dobson. Sue Wright will be sharing her response to her husband's testimony, and then both Sue and Larry will be discussing how Christ restored their marriage. For those of you in a struggling relationship, you will not want to miss tomorrow's edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, thanks for listening and have a great day.

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

Dr. James Dobson: This is James Dobson again. As we close today's program, I just want to thank so many of you out there who make this broadcast possible with your contributions and I want to tell you how much your generosity is appreciated.